

How to Raise Orphaned Kittens

Mom's gone, and you're taking care of her orphaned kittens. Here's what to do.

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An unfamiliar noise caught my attention when I was cleaning out the attic recently. My husband heard it, too, and we looked at each other and asked, "Where's that coming from? I know I heard something."

We found the source of the little squeaks. It seems a feral cat that was seen hanging around our neighbor's yard had given birth in the middle of my craft supplies. The kittens looked to be about 3 days old, so we left them there for the mother to come back to. She never did. The next day the kittens were still there, weaker than before. We knew we had to do something for the helpless creatures or they would starve to death.

Do you know what you would do if the litter was in your attic? Anywhere feral cats abound, so do feral kittens. A cat ready to give birth will look for the most comfortable, quiet place available to have her litter, and that sometimes means on top of your softest storage items.

If you hear those little squeaks and mews, you need to act fast if the mother is unable to care for her little ones. You can take them to the animal shelter or a humane organization, but, otherwise, their lives are in your hands.

First Things FirstOnce you've decided to meet the challenge (and rewards) of raising orphaned kittens, keep them quarantined and take them to your veterinarian for an initial exam as soon as possible, especially if you have other cats in the house.

"Get the little newcomers checked for diseases, parasites and overall health," said James Richards, DVM, director of the Cornell Feline Health Center at Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y. "They should be vaccinated at the first opportunity and tested for contagious diseases. Fleas can cause anemia if they're really bad on a small kitten, so be aware of that, too."

Back at home, prepare an emergency kit for your orphaned kittens. Gather a large cardboard box (for holding the kittens), an adjustable heating pad, some old towels, powdered or liquid kitten formula, as many little feeding bottles as there are people to hold them and plenty of toilet paper.