

Carefully Consider Kittens as Gifts

A feline behavior expert urges thorough planning and follow-through when giving a kitten as a gift.

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Around the holidays, surprising a loved one with a little kitten or puppy for Christmas often becomes a popular idea. Unfortunately, it can end up being a sad event for the family and especially the little kitten or puppy if the recipient is not prepared for the responsibility. Although we love the element of surprise when giving a precious gift, when it comes to a live animal, it's best to think this through, have a good game plan, and make sure it's the appropriate gift for that loved one. Many people ask me about how to handle the task of giving a kitten for Christmas and my advice is always the same: Don't do it. This is a very hectic of year with lots of parties, house guests, and lots of packages, food, and other dangerous items for a little kitten. Instead of giving a kitten at Christmas, how about giving a book on kitten care, some kitten supplies such as a litterbox, food bowls, toys, etc., and wrap those items up with a picture of a kitten. This way, the recipient can read about what will be involved and start to kitten-proof the home in a relaxed way rather than trying to do it frantically during the holidays while dealing with a kitten at the same time. Moving to a new environment is a very frightening event for a young kitten and he/she deserves the time and attention necessary to make the transition smooth and stress-free. Holiday time is loaded with stress and it's not the way to start off a long-term relationship. Bringing a kitten into a home will hopefully be the start of many years together as a family and although you may want to surprise someone, remember that this is a relationship so it might be better for that person to be involved in the choice. In the process, you might discover that the person would rather have an adult cat or maybe he/she has a breed and/or color preference. If there are other animals in the home, you also have to take into consideration what would work best for everyone involved. I spend a great deal of time doing behavioral assessments at shelters around the country and the month I dread the most is February because that's usually the time when many Christmas-gift kittens end up being relinquished to shelters. The honeymoon period is over and some new owners realize that having a kitten was more than they bargained for. In the case of surprising a young child with a Christmas kitten, I have seen many situations where the kitten ends up being forgotten about after the holidays or worse, the child becomes disappointed that the kitten doesn't stay a cute little kitten forever and loses interest as the kitten becomes an adult cat.