

Orphan Basics

Learn the fundamentals to care for a motherless kitten.

By Dusty Rainbolt

When you rescue a newborn kitten, you've got a real life emergency in your hands. Don't just drop it off at a shelter, because in the spring shelter staff are up to their eyebrows in kittens. Before handing it over, make sure they don't plan to "humanely euthanize" the kitten. With the proper guidance, hard work and attention to detail, you can nurture an orphaned newborn at home just as its mother would have done.

"If the kitten feels cool to the touch, you need to get his temperature back up," says Louise Holton, founder of Alley Cat Rescue, Inc. in Maryland. "Chill claims a kitten much quicker than hunger. Once a kitty goes into hypothermia you have little chance of bringing him back. Don't feed the kitten until he's warmed up."

Because you don't want the kitten swapping germs with your own cats, sequester it. In a cardboard box, set up a nest — a heating pad covered with a towel. Make sure the box is large enough for the kitten to crawl off the pad if it gets too hot. If you don't have a heating pad, use your own body heat or fill a thick sock with 1/2 cup uncooked rice and microwave it for 60 seconds. Another option is to fill a plastic soda bottle with hot water and cover it with a towel.

Keep the newborn kitten's room at about 90 degrees Fahrenheit. At about 1 week old it can tolerate 80 degrees F; at a month, it can handle 75 degrees F.

Everyone must wash their hands before and after handling the kitten.

****For the full article, pick up the April 2007 issue of CAT FANCY.****

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