

Your Kitten's Layette

Understanding your kitten's needs will help make his homecoming a quick and easy transition. Learn which supplies you should have on-hand.

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Having the right items in place for your new kitten when you bring him home is just as important as having the proper layette for a new baby maybe even more so given that a kitten's habits become set during the first few weeks you have him.

Topping the list is a proper litterbox. Your tiny orphan kitten needs a small box with low sides no more than 2 to 3 inches high. A kitten 6 weeks old or older can easily handle the height of a standard litterbox. Reserve extra-large or jumbo pans with high sides for large adult cats. Whenever possible, use the same litter your kitten used before adoption.

Your kitten also need his own food and water dishes. Persian and Himalayan kittens need flat eating surfaces because of their short, flat faces. As with litter, feed your kitten the same food he is used to eating.

A washable bed is also handy. Many kittens seem to enjoy small, round beds with high sides that can be put directly into the washer and dryer. You may need to try a few locations before you find your kitten's preferred sleeping spot.

With the seemingly endless variety of toys on the market, some guidelines are helpful. Choose small toys your kitten can pick up and carry or toss in the air, but avoid small parts that can come off and be swallowed. Youngsters usually do not respond to catnip, but it's a hit with "teenagers." Fur or fabric mice are popular, as are balls that can be batted or carried. Toy size can grow with the cat. Older kittens enjoy using bigger toys that they can hold with their front legs and kick with their back ones. Several companies make wands with toys or feathers at the end of a tether and that provide hours of fun and exercise for you and your kitten. Such interactive toys require direct supervision.

One or more scratching posts can help ensure that your kitten's natural urge to scratch is not met by using your couch. Provide a sturdy post beginning the day you bring your kitten home. For tiny kittens, a simple, short post is adequate and safer than a tall one. Even at this age, however, the post will be more attractive if it offers a variety of things to do and places to sleep. The post should grow with your kitten and always be at least as tall as your kitten can stretch.