

Cats as pets

Life expectancy: up to 20 years

Costs

Animal	300-2000 CHF	Depends on breed and provenience
Initial costs	500-1000 CHF	Food and water dish, litter box, scratching post, various other installations (cat flap, ladder etc.) Veterinary costs for castration, vaccinations, worming
Yearly costs	ca. 1000 CHF	Food, cat litter, regular veterinary costs for vaccinations and worming, stays in animal pensions and shelters during holidays.
Varia	Unforeseen veterinary costs can greatly exceed the purchase-price of the animals.	

Pedigree cat or house cat?

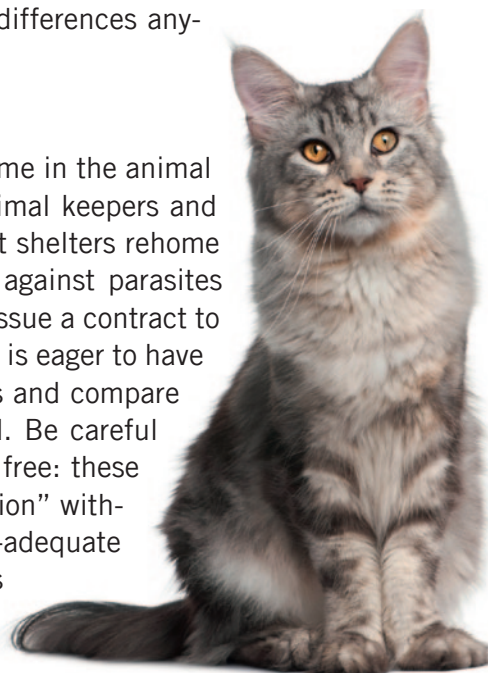
Even before deciding for cats as pets, future cat owners need to inform themselves thoroughly by asking experienced cat owners or cat specialists as well as by reading relevant literature. Pedigree cats and non-pedigree European shorthairs do not differ greatly. Some breeds are a bit more active and vocal (Siamese), others a bit more sedate (Persians), but there are also many different character types of common shorthair cats, such as playful, affectionate or independent ones. Due to intensive breeding, pedigree cats can be affected by hereditary diseases. Some long-haired cat breeds cannot groom their own fur sufficiently any more. To prevent felting, they have to be brushed daily, which they may not tolerate.

Kitten or adult cat? Male or female?

Kittens are very playful (and sometimes destructive), but in adult cats, the character is already well settled. Since it is advisable to neuter all cats at the age of 6 months, sex differences are not that pronounced and may be covered by individual character differences anyway.

Where to buy, what to pay attention to?

Many adorable cats and kittens await a new owner and home in the animal shelters run by local animal protection organisations. Animal keepers and shelter employees are a competent source of advice. Most shelters rehome only animals that are vaccinated, neutered and treated against parasites (fleas, ticks, worms). Most shelters also charge a fee and issue a contract to be signed by the future owners of the animals. If an owner is eager to have a pedigree animal, it is advisable to visit several breeders and compare the conditions under which the kittens have been raised. Be careful when cats are cheap or if they are given away almost for free: these animals might originate from uncontrolled "mass production" without any health care or examination and without species-adequate housing and handling. This can lead to health problems and behavioural disorders later in life.



Refrain from buying animals via the internet! You either support animal mass production under unspeakable conditions, or you might even be cheated.

What do cats need?

Cats need food twice a day, kittens much more often, and all cats need fresh water all the time. Since cats are pure carnivores, they can neither be fed on vegetarian food nor on leftovers of human food. Many types of optimally composed food are available commercially. Cow's milk is no adequate cat food, since the lactose in it can lead to diarrhoea. However, cats always need access to cat grass to get rid of swallowed hairballs. The food bowl should neither be placed next to the cat toilet nor next to the water bowl. The toilets need to be cleaned once or twice daily. Swiss Animal Protection legislation rules one cat toilet per cat, irrespective of whether the cats are housed indoor-only or with access to outdoors. It also prescribes a scratching post, various elevated resting places, opportunities for hiding, climbing and play, as well as species-specific occupation.

Conspecifics

Socialised cats should enjoy contact with other cats. Socialized indoor cats should therefore not be kept alone. Animal Protection legislation rules for at least visual contact with other cats and sufficient interactions with humans in singly housed indoor cats. Kittens must stay with their mother and litter mates at least for 12 weeks. Thus they learn being social. Socialized cats will usually also display less behavioural disorders later in life.

Space requirements

Indoor cats need to have permanent access to at least one room per cat, therefore there shouldn't be more than 3 cats in a three-room-flat. Outdoor cats should always be allowed into the house and not be shut out. Animal protection legislations rules a maximum of 4 cats per 7m² floor space. For each additional cat, 1.7m² have to be added. However, these minimum requirements do not allow for a permanent, adequate housing of cats!

Indoor cat or free-roaming cat?

Both types of housing cats have their disadvantages. Free roaming cats live in a variable and very interesting habitat, but are subjected to a wide range of risks, such as traffic accidents or diseases. Indoor cats should be kept indoors from birth. They live longer (only when comparing mean life expectancy) and have a less risky life, but they are much more prone to behavioural disorders than free-roaming cats. The flat needs to be structured adequately and should offer at least some access to fresh air and sunshine on a secured balcony. The owner should interact frequently with the cats. The rooms can be structured by scratching posts, elevated look-outs, soft, dark and sheltered resting places and empty cardboard boxes as hideouts and opportunities to play. Owners who do not tolerate the cat on the new sofa should consider not keeping cats at all. Cats should be able to use all three dimensions of a room. Beware unsecured balconies and bottom hung windows! Every year some cats are killed by these types of windows.

Veterinary care

Annual veterinary consists of regular vaccination and worming, but also a general health check-up by the vet.

Neutering

Every responsible cat owner should have his/her cat castrated. Otherwise, cats bear litters twice a year, making cat population grow very quickly. Annually, over 12'000 unwanted cats are brought to shelters in Switzerland and wait to be rehomed. Neutered cats do not become more obese or lethargic than uncastrated ones, and they stay proficient predators. They are also generally healthier. It is not necessary for a cat to have had kittens before neutering. Castration at the age of 6 months is ideal, in adult cats winter (November through February) is optimal since the cats then are neither pregnant nor lactating.

Cats and Holidays

Cats are preferably left at home in their familiar surroundings and should be cared for by a competent, reliable "cat-sitter". As an alternative, cats can also be brought to an animal shelter or pension, which costs 15-30 CHF per day. Abandon of animals is forbidden in Switzerland and can be fined with up to 20'000 CHF.

Cats and Kids

Cats can become lovable partners and friends for children. However, children cannot take care for a cat on their own. An adult needs to guide and supervise them. The cats need to be able to retreat from the children at any time, and they should not be held tight by the children. Small children and cats should never be left alone at any time.

Behavioural problems

House soiling, aggressiveness and other behavioural problems are no reason for abandoning a cat. Trained animal behaviour counsellors help cat owners adapt the housing of the cat to its behavioural needs and thus solve the problem, with success rates of up to 80%. Swiss Animal Protection SAP offers free behaviour counselling for cat owners!

Information and contacts

- Information brochure: „Cats“ (German, French, Italian) can be ordered for free by sending a C5 postage-paid envelope with your own address to Swiss Animal Protection SAP / Schweizer Tierschutz STS, Dornacherstrasse 101, Postfach, 4008 Basel, phone 061 365 99 99, Fax 061 365 99 90, www.tierschutz.com, sts@tierschutz.com, helpdesk, free advice and pet behaviour counselling (German, French, English), free brochures, addresses of shelters, children's club www.krax.ch
- Information brochure "Cats – species-adequate pet keeping" (German, French, Italian), issued by the Swiss Federal Veterinary Office. Can be ordered for free from the Swiss Federal Veterinary Office (PDF or booklet), www.bvet.admin.ch and www.tiererichtighalten.ch

Publisher:

Swiss Animal Protection SAP, Dornacherstrasse 101, 4008 Basel,
phone 061 365 99 99, fax 061 365 99 90, www.tierschutz.com, sts@tierschutz.com