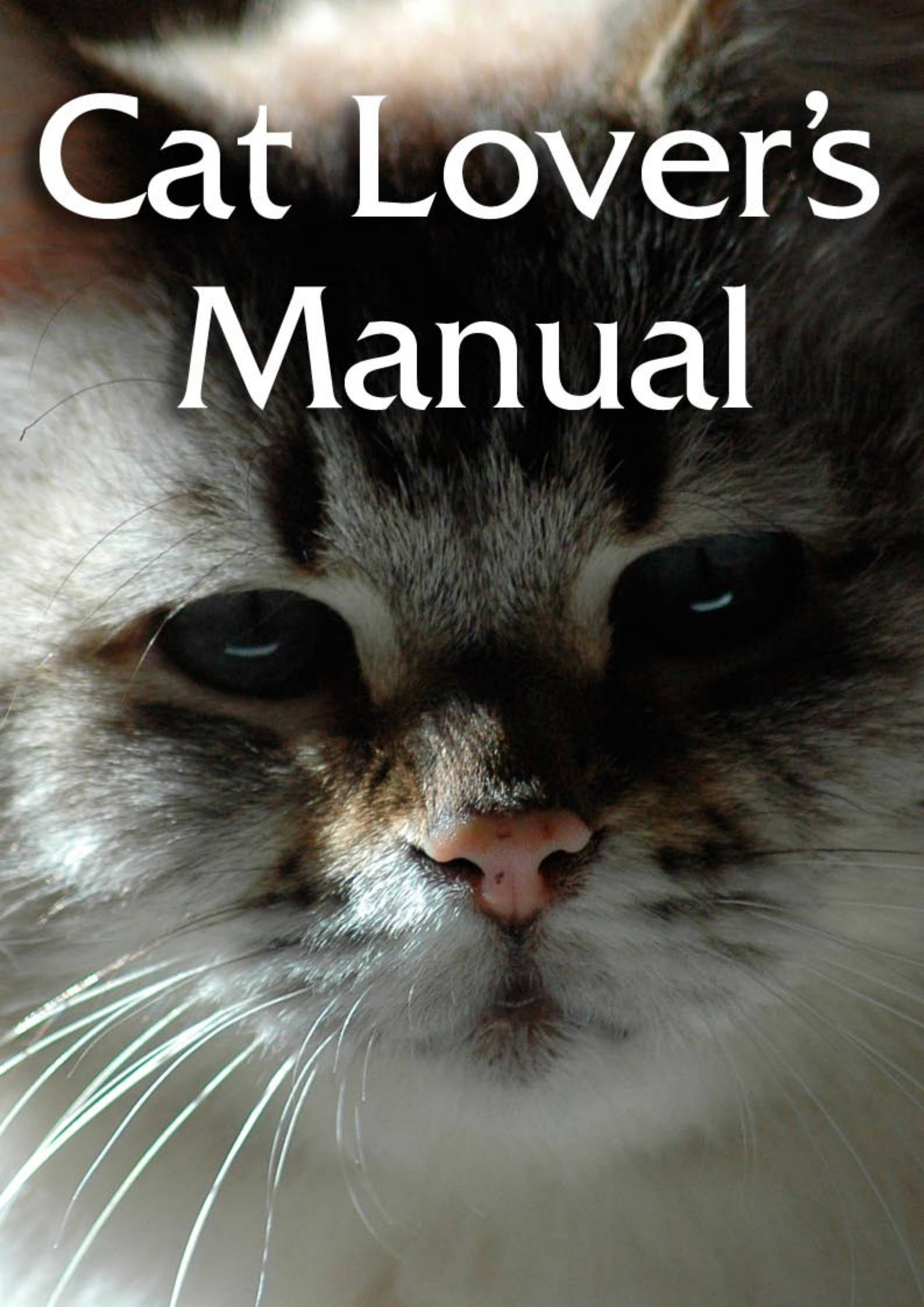


# Cat Lover's Manual



# For the Cat Lover

**If you have a cat living with you, you probably know by now that you will never “own” your cat the way you could “own” a dog. The appropriate stance is humbly and gratefully to enjoy the time your cat companion so graciously sees fit to spend with you, and bestow as much attention on it as it will permit. You may also, of course, try and make life with you as pleasant as possible.**

(For the cat.)

Here are some of the greatest tips ever to help you fulfil this function  
- or perhaps we should say, this calling!

*The surest way to forfeit the esteem of a cat is to treat him as an inferior being.  
(Michael Joseph)*

## **How should I handle the adjustment?**

If you've just adopted a kitten or an adult cat, keep your new pet strictly indoors for at least two weeks - this is essential for its safety. Begin by confining it to one room of your house for several days (preferably a bedroom or other room that you use frequently). Provide fresh food and water and a clean litter box, and if possible a radio, and slowly introduce your new pet to the rest of your house, until it has become used to all the smells, sights and sounds of its new home.

If you have other pets, wait about a week before introducing them to the newcomer. This will give the new pet time to adjust and calm down before encountering strangers. This is especially important if you've adopted an older cat. Ideally, the “old” and

“new” pets should be able to see each other but be separated in some way, eg by a mesh door or fence, to ensure that they can satisfy their curiosity but continue to feel safe. If this is not possible, introduce them one by one to the newcomer (keeping boisterous dogs on a leash at first). Make sure that you are there when the animals first meet as well as for the first several days or even weeks, until you are completely sure that they have accepted each other.

Don't be surprised if they react with great hostility at first; cats sometimes hiss and spit at each other for up to two weeks. Don't scold your “old” cat for this kind of behaviour; it needs a lot of extra love and reassurance that it is not being replaced in your home and in your affections. Practically ignore the new cat in the “old” cat's presence, but touch both cats often in order to transfer their smells to each other.

When you introduce a new kitten to an older cat, give the older cat all your attention, so that the kitten will understand that the older cat should be deferred to.

If you've been planning a holiday, it's an excellent plan to put the "old" and new cats in a cattery together, since they tend to accept each other much more easily on neutral ground.

Remember to explain the situation to the cattery owner, though, so that he or she can keep a watchful eye on your pets. Then, when you take all your cats home, keep the new one indoors as described above, and allow the "old" ones to visit it several hours a day.

After two weeks, start introducing your new pet to the garden, an hour or so at a time, preferably under supervision. It's also a good idea to teach your cat which window to use to get into and out of the house by physically guiding it in and out of the window several times. When your pet is completely settled in, ensure that this window is always kept ajar. Alternatively, have a pet door installed in one of your outside doors.

In potentially stressful situations, such as in a new environment, you could use products such as Feliway, available from your vet, to reassure your cat. Or you could spray a little of this product onto the inside of your pet carrier.

*At many human faults a cat  
Will never take offense:  
Two things though they cannot stand:  
The wretched Door,  
the horrid Fence  
(Brian Aldiss)*

### **What food would be best?**

If possible, feed your kitten or cat one of the balanced, nutritional and tasty dry cat foods supplied by your vet. This will meet all your pet's nutritional needs, and will ensure that it enjoys a long and

healthy life. Although these foods may strike you as expensive, smaller amounts are needed compared with the supermarket brands, and since these foods will keep your pet healthier, you save on vets' bills in the long run. Brand names we recommend are Iams, Royal Canin and Hill's Science Diet.

Also ensure that your kitten or cat always has fresh water. If you would like to give your pet treats, keep them small and infrequent. Remember that fish or dairy milk can give cats, especially kittens, diarrhoea.

*A cat could be man's best friend;  
but would never stoop to it.  
(Anonymous)*

### **Need a few housing tips?**

What bedding should I provide?

Most cats enjoy sleeping just about anywhere and will choose their own favourite spots. Placing soft bedding materials in baskets or "cat caves" (available at pet shops or from your vet) in secluded, cosy corners will encourage your pet to use them.

*There are two means of refuge from  
the miseries of life: music and cats.  
(Albert Schweitzer)*

What toilet facilities are needed?

Ensure that your cat always has a clean litter box - preferably more than one for small kittens, since they might not be able to hold out if a litter box is not nearby. Even when your pet has started going out, it's a good idea to keep at least one litter box indoors for rainy days.

What toys should I allow?

Cats love toys. You can buy soft balls or furry "mice" filled with catnip from pet shops or your vet, or you can make toys like balls of paper or foil. Make sure the toys are too large to swallow. Balls of wool or string aren't a good idea, as they can become lodged in the cat's intestinal tract or tangled around its neck.

## How do I keep my cat safe in and around the home?

In addition to the points mentioned under "housing", watch out for any of the following possible dangers in and around your home:

- hot stove tops
- open toilet seats
- bath water (a kitten could burn or - worse - drown in a bathful of water)
- poisonous plants your cat might nibble on
- chemical or insecticide sprays on surfaces your pet could come into contact with
- bottle caps or bottle seals your cat could choke on
- empty poison bottles
- cars: your kitten or cat could be sleeping on the bonnet or under a wheel
- open doors that could slam shut on your pet
- chicken or other fine bones that could lodge in your cat's throat
- plastic bags that could smother a kitten
- the washing machine or tumble drier, both of which cats love to climb into
- buckets and other containers filled with water that your kitten could drown in
- It's a good idea to check enclosures like garages and toolsheds before locking up for the night or when you leave the house, just to make sure you don't inadvertently shut your pet away for hours (or days) with no food or water.
- Also remember that very small children don't always know what might hurt an animal. A child's passionate (but unwittingly rough) stroking or patting could harm your cat - possibly even fatally. So keep an eye on kiddies who want to "play with the kittie", for their sake as well as your cat's.

## Should I groom my cat?

Although your cat will groom itself every day, you could help it by brushing it regularly to prevent its hair from matting, thereby avoiding the ingestion of hair balls.

*Be-ooootiful cat!*  
*Delicious cat! Exquisite*

*cat! Satiny cat! Cat like a soft owl, cat with paws like moths, jewelled cat, miraculous cat! Cat, cat, cat, cat.*  
*(Doris Lessing)*

## Do I clip my pet's nails?

If your pet's nails become too long and hook onto everything, cut only the tips of the rounded nails using special clippers or sturdy human nail clippers. Do this chore where you can see well enough to ensure that you don't cut into the quick of the nails. Keeping the nails fairly short will minimise damage when your cat sharpens its nails on your furniture. You could also get your cat a scratching post. The least expensive cost around R20 and are available at most supermarkets. Vets and pet shops usually keep the more elaborate (and more expensive) scratching posts. Take a good look at the section on training if there's a favourite piece of furniture...

## Should I train my kitten?

Never raise a hand to your pet, since you will lose its trust. If you want to discourage it from doing something, it's a good idea to keep an unused manual pump spray bottle filled with clean water handy.

It usually takes only a few gentle squirts in your pet's direction to get your message across. Also, your pet won't associate the discipline with you, but is more likely to develop quite a dislike for the spray bottle! You could also on occasion give a shout and clap your hands loudly to discourage something you can see is about to happen.

*Time spent with cats is never wasted. (Colette)*

## How do I care for my cat's health?

A kitten should receive its first inoculation and deworming at 6 to 8 weeks, and boosters a month later. It is very important to have it sterilised at 5 to 6 months. It is very important to have it sterilised at

about 5 months. It is not true that a female has to have at least one litter before being sterilised. This holds no benefits whatsoever for her, and only adds to the already huge number of unwanted kittens in the world. Toms also benefit from being neutered as they tend to wander less and get into fewer fights. Neutered toms are also far less likely to contract feline Aids.

In South Africa, sterilisation costs around R300 for males and R450 for females. If this is too steep for you, and you don't live too far from Tshwane, you could contact one of the CatPals (click on "Contact"), who will try and arrange for one of the participating vets to sterilise your pet at a reduced fee.

You would have to complete an application form and comply with a number of requirements. If your financial difficulties are extreme, you could call Dianne of the Foundation for Sterilisation at (012) 664-7866 (after hours).

Take your pet for a veterinary check-up every 6 months, and consult your vet about anything out of the ordinary. Look out for signs of illness such as repeated sneezing, runny eyes, congested nose or loss of appetite. If you notice any of these, take your cat to the vet as soon as possible; quick action can prevent serious illness.

Keep ticks and fleas at bay with the aid of one of the excellent products available from your vet, such as Frontline, Advantage and Program, and deworm at least twice a year.

*God has made the cat to give man  
the pleasure of caressing the tiger.  
(Victor Hugo)*

### **How do I transport my cat?**

Transport your cat in a sturdy pet carrier such as those available from vets or pet shops. This reduces the chances of losing your cat if it panics for some reason.

It's best to keep your pet in its carrier even while

travelling in your car to ensure its safety just in case you have an accident. There should be enough ventilation in the car but no draught, and if you have to let your cat out of

the carrier, be careful not to open any window wider than about one centimetre (half an inch), since a nervous cat can escape through extremely narrow openings.

It's also a good idea to keep some paper towelling in your car in case the stress of the journey gives your cat an upset tummy.

Never allow your pet to leave the car anywhere except at home.

### **What identification do I use?**

Collars and name tags are important aids in ensuring that your pet finds its way home if it should get lost.

We recommend that you use a collar consisting entirely of elastic material, so that the cat can pull its head out if the collar should get stuck. Fit the collar snugly (you should be able to slide in only two fingers), take it off to cut off the excess, and burn or glue the tip to prevent fraying. When the glue has dried, slide the collar over your pet's head.

The bells attached to these collars help to curtail your cat's hunting activities, which can only benefit the "wildlife" in our cities!

It is also vital to have your cat or kitten microchipped. This simply involves asking your vet to implant a microscopic identification chip under its skin. It takes seconds to do and doesn't hurt any more than an injection, but it could very well ensure your cat's safe return if it should stray or be stolen.

*I love cats because I love my home,  
and little by little they become its visible soul.  
(Jean Cocteau)*

### **What do I do if my cat goes missing?**

This is one of a cat owner's greatest fears, cats being the rovers they are. If your cat goes missing

despite the precautions of a collar and microchip (see "Identification" above), there are, fortunately, a number of things you can do to ensure that your pet is one of the many that are reunited with their owners each year:

- Ask around the neighbourhood in case your pet has been locked into someone's garage or toolshed. If not, and if your pet is still missing after a day or two, place leaflets in post boxes around the neighbourhood. Provide a picture of your cat on the leaflet if you can, as well as a description, and of course your address and/or telephone numbers. Also offer a reward. You don't need to mention a specific amount - if your cat is returned to you safely, a specific amount can be decided on then, depending on the circumstances.
- Put up advertisements containing this information at public places in your area, such as the local supermarket and the library, as well as at all the vets' clinics in your vicinity.
- Call your local SPCA or other shelter to enquire whether someone has brought your cat in. If possible, visit the shelter yourself every few days, since a description over the telephone is not always sufficient. (If your cat has been microchipped, there is a very good chance that the shelter will call you even before you've realised that your cat has gone missing!)
- Place ads in the local papers. Most papers have a classified section with a Lost column, and some papers even place such ads free of charge. You might have to call the paper every four days or so to renew the ad. Keep it up for at least a month if necessary.
- Keep up to date with the information in the Found columns of your local papers, since some kind person might advertise if they have found your cat.
- Contact schools in your area. Some schools are prepared to make announcements at assembly times about missing animals.

## How do I care for my indoor cat?

If you have to keep your cat indoors all the time, make sure that it can move freely within your house or flat and that it always has access to fresh water and a clean litter box.

You could also provide a flat dish planted with grass, since most cats like to nibble on a sprig or two every now and then.

If your cat lives on the upper storey of a block of flats, protect it by keeping your windows only partly open, or cover the windows with mesh.

*Onder die gryns van soveel dae geboë  
vind ek 'n stukkie helder hemel  
in die vygieblou van my kat se oë  
(from an Afrikaans poem by Lina Spies)*