



# A Guide to Choosing A Reputable Breeder

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*Health is most important. Look at structure and temperament, secondarily. Then, consider your preference for color and sex.*

Ask the following questions:

## HEALTH

1. What health tests are conducted on your breeding cats?
  - a. They should respond with HCM, PK Deficiency, and SMA. Ask for proof of the results. Some reputable catteries have the results posted on their breeding cats' pages.
2. Do you do an annual echocardiogram for HCM?
  - a. If a cattery only tests for HCM by DNA, RUN do not walk away as DNA alone cannot sufficiently screen for HCM.
3. What is the inbreeding coefficient on the litter?
  - a. Inbreeding is **not a bad thing** in Maine Coons provided the percentage is **less than 12%**. Because we are working with a closed population, there will *always* be an inbreeding coefficient (a Maine Coon must be bred to a Maine Coon to be a Maine Coon)

## SHOWING/STRUCTURE

1. Do you show and if so, what organization are you affiliated with?
  - a. The answer should be yes. If not, ask why they are not showing.
2. What show standard do you follow?
  - a. Ask your breeder what "look" they are striving for. They should be able to discuss how their cats fit in with their organization's standard.
3. Do the parents, grandparents, or ancestors' have any wins?
  - a. In CFA, RW stands for Regional Winner, NW stands for National Winner, GC—Grand Champion, and CH—Champion in CFA. Titles will precede a cat's name.
  - b. TICA is also an acceptable registry, but cats from TICA should also be, at minimum, backed with champions.

## IF YOU WANT TO SHOW:

4. I may want to show my kitten . . .
  - a. Ask about your breeders' policies on showing. Not every kitten is destined for the show hall. Some breeders will charge more for this privilege as you are carrying your breeders' reputation into the ring and they will assume responsibility for



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training you. Some breeders will classify show quality cats as more expensive because these cats have the potential to title and would usually be retained by the cattery.

## TEMPERAMENT

1. Can I schedule a cattery visit to meet the breeding cats?
  - a. This provides you an opportunity to ensure you like the temperament and look of the cats. Some breeders will allow this; some won't. I **strongly** encourage you to find one that allows home visits as this allows you to see temperament firsthand.
2. Discuss your ideal temperament in a cat.
  - a. Maine Coons should have the classic gentle giant temperament but they also will be individualized. They may be lap cats (not frequently), active, social, outgoing, independent, moody, cuddly, talkative, quiet (just like people, there are MANY variations). Parents are your best indication of a kittens' temperament.
3. What are the personalities of Mom and Dad?
  - a. Asking for parental personalities clues you into your future. Is the queen standoffish? Who has a dominant streak? Ask these questions before you set your heart on a certain kitten.
4. How do you socialize your kittens?
  - a. What practices does the breeder do to ensure socialization?
    - i. Some breeders take their kittens to dog parks; some meet the neighbors in a stroller. Some do house visits with approved friends and family. Ask about the practices your breeder does, if any.

## CATTERY PRACTICES

1. How many litters do you have a year?
  - a. On average, a queen should have 1 litter per year, 2 if she is aggressively cycling.
2. How large are your litters usually?
  - a. A good breeder knows his or her lines and should be able to tell you (not definitively, of course, as mother nature controls all) how many kittens a queen has had or her mother has had in the past.



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3. When do kittens go home?
  - a. Kittens should **never leave home before 12 weeks under any circumstances**. A kitten should be kept at the cattery from 12-16 weeks, depending on individual preference.
    - i. I like to send my kittens home at 12 weeks after they've developed proper social behaviors but with a four-week window to bond and learn their new environment without being fearful and set in their ways.
4. How are your kittens housed?
  - a. Is it an outdoor cattery, a home environment, cages, or enclosures? The setup of the cattery impacts how kittens are raised and how they will later develop.

## RESERVATION PROCESS

*Breeders receive on average 5-7 inquiries a day. They also have lives outside of their catteries. Be patient. Some breeders will respond in 24 hours, some in a week, some in a month, some when a litter is due. Contact your breeder via the website and do some research on why you want to work with them. Understand you are buying more than a kitten—you are also purchasing a relationship with your breeder who will be there for you and your baby for years to come.*

1. Do you have any kittens available or can I be wait-listed?
  - a. You may be waiting up to 6-8 months or even 1-2 years if you have a specific preference. Sometimes, your preference can go unfulfilled. Just because a color is genetically possible does not mean it will be produced. Breeders will match kittens based on fit and preference, but fit will and should always trump preference.
2. The Deposit
  - a. Some breeders will charge a non-refundable deposit for a finite number of spaces. In this case, the deposit is deducted from the final balance of the kitten (in my cattery, a deposit of \$300 is deducted from the purchase of a pet kitten, leaving \$2200-2700 due at pick-up).
  - b. The deposit will be transferable to any litter.
  - c. Never transfer a deposit through Western Union or Walmart. Meet the breeder in person if possible to deliver the deposit. I collect mine after a cattery visit and approval.



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## 3. Pregnancy

*Congratulations! Your baby has been conceived! The wait begins. Now what?*

- a. Understand that most catteries will not release photos or news of the kittens until 3 weeks as the kittens may develop a complication or die. This is not the breeders' fault. A poem from Heather Field (2013) rings true, a 60 gram baby is born and the breeder fights to save the little one, feeding every two hours, no sleep, hoping the little one makes it, only to find that it doesn't. Sometimes, the odds are stacked against us. Show compassion. This is a tough job done out of love not money.
- b. Ask for updates on the queen.
  - i. Breeders will update you as delivery approaches; they should inform you when the queen reaches day 45 and they should get an x-ray or an ultrasound for count.
  - ii. An ultrasound will show live kittens but not every kitten will make it between day 45 and delivery. 1-2 stillborn kittens a litter is common. This is nature, after all.
  - iii. If a difficult delivery or if the breeder is extremely busy, no news is good news.
- c. Breeders will update you when babies are born and thriving.

LITTER BORN BUT MY PREFERENCE WASN'T THERE:

- a. Breeders will offer you a kitten that you might be interested in or they will hold your deposit until next litter.
  - b. You always have the option to wait but do not be rude as breeders cannot control mother nature.
- ## 4. Updates on New Kitten
- a. A breeder will be updating you with one picture a week and some information on your new baby, usually beginning by week 6. You'll become close friends with your breeder during this time.
- ## 5. Visits & Pick-Up
- a. Around 8-10 weeks, you should have your first meeting with your baby before pick-up so that you can see and meet your little one. At 12-16 weeks, your baby will be released to you for you to come home.



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- i. Do not bring animals to pick-up as it will stress the baby. You may know your dog; your kitten will not and this adjustment is very hard for the baby.
- ii. You will be expected to sign a legally binding contract with strict stipulations; declawing is inhumane, outlawed in most countries and discouraged in most states!
- iii. Make sure that you bring a locking carrier (only one side open), so that your baby will feel secure.
- iv. Don't forget your checkbook or other specified method of payment.

**REMEMBER: THESE KITTENS ARE YOUR BREEDER'S PRIDE AND JOY. THEY ARE FAMILY. A BREEDER CAN AND WILL DENY THE RIGHT TO ANYONE UNFIT TO HAVE ONE OF THEIR BABIES AS THEY SHOULD.**

**Enjoy your new little one and congratulations on your new breeder!**