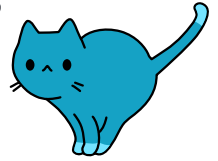


How Many Cats Are Too Many Cats?

Lucy Drury

As I was going to St. Ives,
I met a man with seven wives,
Each wife had seven sacks,
Each sack had seven cats,
Each cat had seven kits:
Kits, cats, sacks, and wives,
How many were there going to St. Ives?



If you are a baby boomer like me, you undoubtedly ran into this nursery rhyme sometime during your childhood. If this is new to you, and you tried to total up the number of cats and kittens, you should have come up with 343 cats and 2,401 kittens. The generally accepted answer is “at least one” (the narrator). We don’t know about the rest of them. Were the wives with the man when the narrator met him, or was he merely telling his new acquaintance about his household? Was the man going or coming from St. Ives? The riddle doesn’t say. All we know is he met a man with a lot of cats in his household while he was journeying to St. Ives. We have no other facts to go on—we can only guess.

I think many of us in the cat fancy feel like the man on the road at times. Suddenly, our one show cat has turned into a colony of retired show cats, several breeding pairs, and a lot of kittens. We remember those days when we had one cat snuggling on our lap, and now wonder if we have too many, especially when the cat on your lap slaps another one trying to climb on, too.

How many cats are too many cats, we wonder?

The good news: If you can ask yourself that question, you are probably not in danger of becoming a cat hoarder or a crazy cat lady. And just like the St. Ives riddle, there are a lot of variables involved in determining a number. For some people, one cat is too many. Others can easily give a home to two dozen cats. Some cats thrive in a colony situation. Some cats need to be “only children.”

As you might now suspect, we can’t answer the “how many” question. What we can do is give you some things to consider when determining what your limit might be.

Regulatory Requirements

I put this one first because of the high variability and it is what it is. It can be very difficult to properly research all of the state, local, and community animal-limit laws and guidelines. Often, they can conflict with each other. Some can be waived. Some are unenforceable. Others aren’t enforced unless a complaint is made. However, if you are going to engage in a breeding program, you want to understand what the rules are for your particular location at every level of governance, and either not exceed that limit or ask for waivers or permits.

Resources

To properly care for your cats, there are four basic resources you need to consider: space, creature comforts, money, and time. Let’s take a look at each one of these:

1. Space

Anyone who has watched a cat turn liquid and plant themselves into a box that looks three sizes too small for them knows that having a lot of wide-open space to romp through is not all that important to many cats. One writer did take a stab at quantifying what the optimal number of cats should be for a particular residence. They observed that homes of 1,000 square feet or less should never have more than two cats, but you could add a cat for every 500

square feet. Then add or subtract for things like children, dogs (minuses), and outdoor enclosures (add).

This is a pretty good rule of thumb for the average pet owner. By her math, a person could have six cats in a 3,000-square-foot home—but only if they had no dogs and no children. Seems reasonable, but there are more factors in play when it comes to space. First, if you have six cats who get along and the space is well “catified,” 1,500 square feet is plenty. For two cats that want to kill each other, 3,000 square feet is not enough unless there is a door between them. Vertical space and resources also need to be considered. A favorite spot in my home is the tops of the kitchen cabinets. I believe these accessible high vantage points (floor, bar, cabinet) allow me to add a cat or two to my maximum number. I have several high cat trees with very popular top tiers and boxes, again, adding to my maximum number from a space consideration.

For a breeder, other space considerations are quiet places for queens and litters, and stud rooms or generously sized cages for those boys that just can’t be allowed in the general household population. Square footage is meaningless in these scenarios. These factors reduce the number of cats that can be comfortably housed in a household.

2. Creature Comforts

Just because you have a big, empty mansion does not mean you can comfortably add a cat for every 500 square feet. Space itself is not enough, not if you don’t have



things to make that space interesting. Window perches, cat trees, climbing ropes and shelves, food puzzles, comfy beds (yes, some cats do like beds), boxes, track wheels, sufficient litter boxes, water bowls, and their own feeding area can create a cat paradise in a small area. Don't overlook video and audio entertainment. Most cats love to watch cat videos and listen to music. An appropriately decked-out 1,500-square-foot area can keep a dozen cats happier than three cats in a 3,000-square-foot home that offers them nothing but a shiny floor to lie on.

3. Money

If you are sending your children to school barefoot because all your money is going to cat food and vet bills, you may have too many cats. Seriously, properly caring for your cat is not a cheap undertaking. Expect to spend anywhere from \$500 to \$1,000 a year per cat on food, litter, and basic veterinary care, depending on where you live. Add another \$500 or so per year if you carry pet health insurance, or be prepared to self-insure when there is an emergency you need to cover. An emergency vet visit or surgery can run into thousands of dollars. If

you need to postpone basic vet care appointments because you lack either the time or the financial resources, it is probably a good idea to take a hard look at your numbers. And if you are skipping veterinary care for your animals outright because you can't afford it, you definitely have too many cats.

4. Time

Of all the resources, this is probably the most critical and yet the hardest to determine. Studies have shown that cats bond to their human companions just as human infants do. However, just like human chil-

How to Research Pet Limit Laws

Sharon Coleman, CFA Legislative Legal Analyst

How many cats can be kept at a particular location? The location is actual real estate, "location matters," and the answer will be determined by local, not state law, or by private restrictions imposed on certain parcels. Private limits can be terms of individual rental agreements or imposed on all owners or tenants within a community development by "CC&Rs" (recorded covenant, conditions, and restrictions) limiting use of the property subject to rules that are administered by homeowner associations (HOAs.) The existence of private restrictions should be a part of a preliminary determination for any specific property. These are governed by state law and beyond the scope of this article.¹ Always obtain documents and consult your own attorney. Financial and personal risks can be high, so decisions must be made with care.

Public limit laws are enacted by either the incorporated municipality or the county governing the individual property under investigation. Verify and corroborate to ensure using the correct law. There are no compiled lists of these laws and no substitute for careful research to find within a particular code, every applicable provision. At a minimum, a general number may be included in the "animal law" covering pets. These may cover dogs only or include cats and sometimes other species. Cats are

typically subject to a minimum age threshold to allow for placing kittens. A much less common provision may allow more sterilized cats in a rescue or nonprofit activity. Cats may be subject to a species-specific absolute limit or part of a total allowance including dogs or other species. Numerical laws may also include property sizes. These may be provisions for excess numbers requiring a "kennel" qualification that might include cats in the same requirements or have separate terminology and provisions for "catteries." There are no drafting standards, and provisions are often haphazardly copied.

Even without limits in the animal law, there may be additional animal restrictions in zoning laws. The basic concept is dividing the land into zones, for example, single-family residential, types of multi-family housing, commercial, manufacturing, recreational, agricultural, and other categories where only specific uses are allowed. These may require permitting, variances, or non-conforming uses. These may or may not include pet limits, kennels, and catteries, either personal, hobby, commercial, or other descriptions. When allowable uses are subject to permitting, this may be a godsend or total barrier depending on additional provisions and processes not always obvious from ordinance language. Professional advice is often necessary to evaluate whether a

specific location will be workable for the number of cats anticipated. Breeding and sales must be evaluated separately from numbers.

Also, additional animal provisions may be included in other parts of a code. Both an index search and internet general search should be included and checked.

Access to codes online is now widespread in the United States but not universal. Even online codes may not be current and must be verified. The websites of animal service providers, whether public agency or private contractor should be checked for ordinances, links, or other information. If codes are not available online, hard copies should be accessible at the jurisdiction's offices and/or a local library. Check recent agendas and minutes of governing bodies for animal issues as well as local news outlets if available. Keep careful notes, especially of any conversations. Using a scanning app on a phone is a good backup for making copies.

Enforcement of limit laws is usually complaint-driven, often by spiteful neighbors motivated by something other than animals. Fanciers should research possible penalties.

1. <https://www.berding-weil.com/articles/enforcement-of-pet-restrictions.php>

dren, some cats are better at sharing their human parents than others. Your cat may be quite bonded to you but does not require your lap to be happy. I have one who is very devoted, but after about 15 minutes of “mommy time,” he gets bored, goes off and watches squirrels from his favorite cat tree. On the other hand, you may have a cat who demands to be the center of your world, and nothing less than your undevoted attention is acceptable. If you have one or more cats like that, you may want to think hard before adding another. Just like humans, stress takes a toll on cats and can manifest itself both physically and behaviorally. A primary source of feline lower urinary tract disease (FLUTD) is stress. No one can adequately explain why crystals form in cats that are stressed. Maybe it is simply they are not drinking enough, but the correlation is well established. A stressed cat can be hard to spot, particularly if one has a lot of cats. Cats that are less interactive, sitting in tucked positions, shunning their humans, getting into fights with other cats, engaging in inappropriate elimination, or behaving in a destructive manner may simply be stressed because you are not spending as much time with them as they would like. If you have one or more cats engaging in these behaviors, you may have too many cats.

The cat owner also needs to have the time to provide a clean and safe environment for their cats. Feeding, cleaning litter boxes, sweeping up hair, socializing kittens, and vet visits take up a lot of time when you have large numbers of cats, and this is only a partial list. If you are a breeder, advertising and placing your kittens also take up a lot of time. If a family has a lot of work, school, and other time commitments, they may not have time to properly care for large numbers of cats.

Quality of Life

This is our last, and to me, most important consideration. What quality of life are you providing for your cats, and how are the cats impacting your own quality of life?



Cats

There are so many things that determine a cat's quality of life, and we touched on many of them earlier. One point we didn't discuss: Is that cat truly content in your home, or would it be happier in someone else's? If you can honestly say that all of your cats would be happier living together and staying with you, and you can adequately provide for them, you don't have too many cats (government rules notwithstanding). A number is just a number. If you know a cat would be happier in a smaller colony or as an only cat and the center of someone's world, then you need to start working to place that cat. This is true whether you have two cats or 20 cats. You can always leave the door open for the cat to come back if it doesn't work out. But in the instances where I or a friend have pondered this question and placed the cat, the cat has always been happier in the new environment. We may miss them, but it's not always about us.

Humans

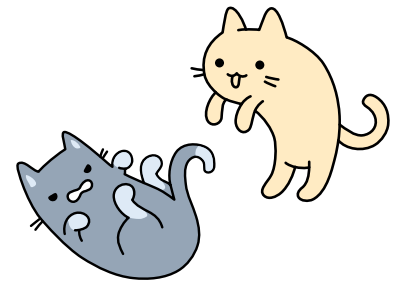
Finally, there's your quality of life. How are large numbers of cats impacting you? Even if we have the resources and are taking great care of them, having the number of cats around usually required for a quality show/breeding program can constitute a time and energy vampire. Are we missing events that we really want to attend? Are vacations a distant, fond memory because you can't find a quality pet sitter? Is your boss getting irritated because you need to take a few days off to deliver kittens—AGAIN? Do you skip coffee dates with a friend because vacuuming is a full-time job? Do you just want to be able to write an article for Cat Talk without having to battle multiple kittens walking across your keyboard?

Of course, we all get frustrated or annoyed with our cats from time to time, just like the other human residents of a household. This alone does not indicate too many cats. Sometimes all we need is to take a little

break. I am quite enjoying the ability to finish the article at the CFA Annual while looking out at the Tucson skyline without all my furry little helpers. I appreciate my husband holding down the fort while I take a break from managing three litters of young kittens. A kitten “explosion” takes its toll in the short term, but the immense satisfaction I derive from the hobby makes it all worth it. I don't personally believe I have too many cats, but I do believe I have reached my limit and have started to plan for several of my younger show and breeding cats to go to new homes when that right home comes along. That number is going to be different for every person based on their age, circumstances, and ability to provide from them. Providing for them also means a contingency plan if you can no longer provide for your crew.

Survey Says...

If you were hoping for some magic formula to help you determine how many cats you should have, you've come to the wrong place. Hopefully, though, you now have the points to consider and can determine that number yourself. Listen to your heart, and you will know when you have reached your limit.



Sources:

1. As I Was Going To St. Ives. (unknown) Wikipedia. Retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/As_I_was_going_to_St_Ives
2. Ashley, S. (2019) How Many Cats Is Too Many? No, But Seriously... Retrieved from: <https://www.purewow.com/family/how-many-cats-is-too-many>
3. Purrfect Love. (2020) How Many Cats Is Too Many? Retrieved from: <https://purrfectlove.net/how-many-cats-is-too-many/>
4. Reffue, D.(2023) The Cost of Owning a Cat in Each State. *Pettable*. Retrieved from: <https://pettable.com/blog/cost-of-owning-a-cat#how-much-does-a-cat-cost-per-year>
5. Stanfield, S. (2023) How Many Cats is Too Many? Potential Health Concerns & Care Requirements. *Hepper*. Retrieved from: <https://www.hepper.com/how-many-cats-is-too-many/>