

## **So You Want To Be A Sphynx Breeder?**

The sphynx is not the easiest of cats to breed, kittens need a lot of care and it can be very expensive and time consuming. A litter of kittens must often be watched 24 hours a day and they require much dedicated care. The main problem with breeding sphynx can be the risk of the kittens contracting hyperthermia so extreme care must be taken to keep them warm. It is essential that you know how to hand feed and be trained in tube feeding (an experienced breeder may show you, or alternatively ask your vet) as babies can be saved by these methods. PLEASE PLEASE make sure that you have sound knowledge of breeding before you embark. Don't let yourself be responsible for babies' deaths by lack of knowledge. Sometimes despite doing everything that you possibly can, you may have to face the heartbreaking reality that your babies do not survive. Don't let your grief be caused by guilt from not learning all you can to give them the best chance in life. If you think that there is a profit to be gained from breeding sphynx please think again! There is no money to be made and you may have to face the real possibility that you not only lose the kittens but your female as well. Ask yourself the question why do you want to breed – you should only ever consider breeding for the betterment of the breed and certainly not because you think that you will make money. The rescue centres in this Country are already overflowing with unwanted cats and kittens, so please do not be irresponsible and add to an already massive problem. If you breed sphynx in the correct way it will far exceed the amount that you can ever hope to make. Sphynx cost a lot of money to buy because an enormous sum of money goes into raising them.

It is essential that you research the breed and the breed standard so you actually know what to look for when purchasing your first breeding sphynx. Hopefully you will have found yourself a mentor far before you get to this stage, they will have gone through the breed standard with you and critiqued many sphynx cats against the written standard. It is ideal if you have visited cat shows and your mentor has talked you through the cats that you have seen and the judging system. The best way to start breeding is to start with a show neuter, and if all has been done correctly then getting your first breeding cat should be the most exciting time of your life. There should be much to look forward to in the future and hopefully you will enter the realms of being a really good breeder who has the sphynx breeds future at heart. Ensure that your breeding cat has no obvious genetic faults and that the breeder you are purchasing from has completed all the necessary testing and provides you with copies of these test results. After your new arrival has settled in enter him/her into some shows and see how close your cat comes to the written standard. Showing is absolutely vital for the breeding of the correct type of sphynx as all cats are judged against the breed standard. It also gives you the ideal opportunity to compare your sphynx against others at the show, and a great opportunity to get to know other breeders.

Research your pedigrees carefully and with these pedigrees in mind look for a compatible stud cat, this means NOT mother/father, auntie/uncle, brother/sister to your cat. Inbreeding the sphynx is very dangerous indeed, can throw out some serious genetic faults, and if you do not want to take my word for this ask a geneticist of why you SHOULD NOT do this. My cats are taken to Professor Rob Gerritson in the Netherlands for heart scanning, he is extremely knowledgeable in the sphynx breed and the vast majority of problems he encounters are from inbred cats. As it can be

VERY difficult to find a sphynx cat at open stud it is better to research stud cats BEFORE you go out and buy a queen.

All too many times I have seen people sold queens for astronomical amounts of money, only to find when it comes the time for the queen to be bred they cannot find a stud cat. There are only a handful of sphynx cats at open stud in the United Kingdom, these are generally used time and time again, by people who just want to breed the sphynx to produce more sphynx. These people are not particularly interested in bloodlines, health or improving the breed. By using the same cats over and over again there is no new genetic diversity to the sphynx gene pool. Many diseases are passed from cat to cat when mating so you should consider how many queens have come before yours when allowing your queen into an outside stud. My stud cats are all STRICTLY CLOSED STUD and for my cattery use only, because I do not want to jeopardise their health for ANYTHING and certainly not for what stud fee I can charge. It is helpful for your queen to have a thorough check up by your vet prior to being mated. HCM scanning is a vital element of a successful breeding programme, I have already said that I use a professor in the Netherlands for my scanning, however many of the Universities in this Country will perform this scanning. A full list of FAB approved cardiologists can be found on the Feline Advisory Bureau's website [www.fabcats.org](http://www.fabcats.org) The scanning although many universities will offer subsidised rates for participating in the scheme can still be very expensive, of course if you find a positive cat you MUST be prepared to spay/neuter him/her. Temperament is vital so please ensure that your cat is of sound temperament, and then try to prepare yourself for heartbreak. Some of the saddest times I have ever had have been through breeding, but it has also brought me some of the proudest and happiest times that I have had, and I am content in the knowledge that I breed these superb cats for the betterment of this wonderful breed.

There are many things that you should think about and a decision to breed should never be taken lightly:-

Not all queens are meant to be bred, and it is not necessarily good for you to breed your queen. Many times I am told that a person wants to breed because it will be good for the children to witness a litter of kittens being born, WHY? Many times the birthing process is traumatic, your queen needs to be kept calm and so do your children for that matter. My daughter only started to be with me at the birthing process when she was getting older and I was confident that both the queen and she would be happy with the whole experience. Ask yourself one question, if your queen was to die in labour could you honestly justify having bred her?

Breeding a male cat will do nothing to stop the behaviour that comes naturally to him such as urinating, spraying or dominance to other cats in your household. If he breeds he will want to breed again and likely his behaviour will become more extreme not better.

People are wrong in their assumption that it is only the entire male cats "tom" cats that spray. Some of the worse sprayers here are females, and they are far sneakier than the males when they are doing it as well. Females often spray when they are coming into call, and unlike dogs that have two seasons a year, female sphynx can come into call every few weeks.

In full heat a female can be extremely noisy, they can yell loudly, this can happen at anytime during the day or night. The behaviour can go on for weeks only to start up again a few weeks later. Male cats also scream for females. Keeping breeding cats can be extremely noisy. Then you can have females that are silent callers, so in this instance great care must be taken to keep male and female apart until she is ready to breed.

Sphynx cats bought as pets should never be bred without prior permission of the breeder. Many breeders will place endorsements on the pedigrees to prevent litters being registered. Kittens that leave the Nudedudes Cattery as pets are exactly that. They are ALWAYS neutered and we also endorse their pedigrees to avoid any confusion. If your breeder does not practice early neutering and has specifically asked you not to breed your cat then please do NOT. We fully support the Winn Feline Foundation policy on early neutering, despite what you are told to the contrary there is absolutely no scientific evidence that it is detrimental to the cat to early neuter. In the study that Winn conducted it was found quite the opposite and the early neutered kittens recovered much better than the older cats. The study can be read at [www.cfa.org/articles/health/early-neuter.html](http://www.cfa.org/articles/health/early-neuter.html)

It is most unethical to break a contract, despite you loosing all credibility with other breeders it is also against the law. Contracts are there for a reason whether verbal or written. If you do not like a contract do not sign it or agree to it.

Please don't kid yourself that you are only breeding for people who want pet sphynx – however way you word it or “flower” it up this is back yard breeding. It will do nothing whatsoever to improve the health of the sphynx breed, and your actions could be detrimental to the entire breed. These are the matings that produce extremely unhealthy and unsound cats and could give this breed a bad name regarding health issues. It will take genuine breeders years to put your mistakes right so please do not practise breeding in this manner.

If after reading all of this you still think you could make a real contribution to the breed the best advice is to find a breeder that you can relate to. Hopefully this person will have the in depth knowledge and be willing to mentor you and help you through the good and the bad parts of breeding. It is important that your chosen breeder is honest and up front about their own cats and the lines they work with, and you should always be completely honest with them. The person who mentors you will have put all their trust in you so please never let them down. It is likely because of them that you are able to breed in the first place and your whole cattery will be based on the trust they have put in you. Remember many breeders have come before you to produce the lines that you will now be working with, please always show respect. The whole foundation of your working relationship should be based on trust, your mentor should be able to trust you as you should be able to store all your faith in them. You will probably be asked by any ethical breeder to start with a show neuter, this will give you an excellent opportunity to learn about what it is like to live with this breed plus you will learn a lot about what is desirable and undesirable in your cat from the judges. Your mentor should be willing to go to shows with you and show you what to do; this is also a great way to really get to know one another and of course can be a lot of fun! Remember breeding is not as simple as putting a male with a female, both

parents should be chosen carefully from suitable pedigrees. Learning about pedigrees and health issues within your chosen breed are the first steps of becoming a responsible breeder and the foundation of your whole cattery. It is best to be sure that you have plenty of breed knowledge and know what faults could be thrown from the lines that you have used and the lines that you plan on combining together. If you are the one on the end of the phone to a worried owner you must either have the answers to their questions or go away and find out all that you can for them.

Take your time, you have lots of it and please be patient. Many sphynx breeders come and go, by following some simple recommendations you can ensure you are one that stays.

A highly thought of and respected breeder once told me that building up a great cattery was like building a house. You have to make sure that your foundations are strong. With much hard work and dedication brick by brick your house will unfold before your eyes. But only when everything is in place will you finally be able to add the layers of paint. Michelle your words have been invaluable, I have heeded them since I started breeding and am grateful all they taught me.

Of course no matter what you do and despite putting in every effort things can go wrong. We are breeding with living, breathing creatures and often Mother Nature can be very harsh. Believe in yourself and hopefully when things do go wrong you will have many to help you out. Remember people can let you down very badly, but there are always good friends to help you back up again!