

INTRODUCING A NEW CAT TO YOUR RESIDENT CAT

The time you spend gradually introducing your cats will prove to be well spent. Your care and attention will establish the foundation for years of harmonious feline companionship.

HOW MANY CATS?

The answer depends on the size of your home, the number (and temperaments) of existing feline residents, and your own expectations. But, as a general rule, the more cats you put in a confined space, the greater the chance of problem behavior.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT CAT

The new cat should be confident, friendly, and not overly aggressive around other cats. Some believe that cats will accept a kitten more readily than an adult cat...many cats find a kitten less threatening but there is no guarantee that YOUR cat will. A sedentary cat may not appreciate a kitten's exuberance. A cat of either sex can fit into a multi-cat household as long as the cat has been spayed or neutered.

PREVENT TERRITORIALITY

The key to successfully introducing a cat to a multi-cat household is to prevent aggression. In most instances of territorial aggression, one cat - often the new arrival - becomes the aggressor and repeatedly attacks one or more of its feline house mates. Think about your new cat's arrival from the perspective of your animals. Your resident cats are comfortable and familiar with their environment. Suddenly, a stranger drops into their midst. The newcomer doesn't know anyone. Out of FEAR, the newcomer (or the resident cat) may snarl and then the other cat snarls back...this is NOT the start of a beautiful friendship!

HABITUATE (To Accustom by Frequent Repetition or Prolonged Exposure)

Your objective should be to habituate your cats to each other. By introducing the newcomer and resident cats in a gradual manner, you reduce their fear of each other. Reward your cats with food or attention as you expose them to one another. Through this process, the cats learn to associate a pleasurable experience (food or attention) with the "thing" they fear (the other cat).

ROOM OF ITS OWN

Before you bring your new cat home, select two rooms to use as temporary quarters for the new arrival. Equip one of the rooms with a litter box, food, and water dishes. Prepare a comfortable bed for your new cat.

WELCOME HOME

Try to schedule your new cat's arrival for a weekend so you can be with your cats during the first critical few days. Carry your new cat (in a cat carrier or box) to the room with the litter box. Open the carrier and wait for the cat to come to you. Show the cat where the food and water dishes are located and put the cat in the litter box. If the cat isn't ready to leave its carrier, leave the room and allow the cat to explore its new environment on its own. Now is a good time to visit your resident cat. They will smell the strange cat on you and know something is up, reassure them that all is OK...play with or offer food treats. Give them plenty of attention, they will soon discover the closed door and figure out that there is a strange animal behind it. Visit the new cat frequently, but don't be surprised if the new cat hides. Try to entice it out of hiding with food. If the cat comes out, give it as much attention as it wants but don't force the cat.

CHANGE ROOMS

The next day, move the new cat, its dishes and litter box to the second room and close the door.

Leave the door of the first room open so the other cats can explore. They will smell the scent of their new house mate and rub against objects in the room to leave their own scent. Alternating rooms each day also helps to prevent territorial behavior.

COUNTER-CONDITIONING

Feed the new cat and resident cats on opposite sides of the closed door. The cats will begin to associate something they need and desire (food) with the smells and sounds of the stranger on the other side of the door.

INCREASE THE EXPOSURE

So far, the cats have become accustomed to each other's smells and sounds. When you think the time is right (some need weeks or others only a few days of separation), open the door a crack. Secure the door so the cats can peek through the crack, but not enter the room. Observe the meeting without getting in the way. Don't be alarmed if your cats snarl or hiss when they first see each other, but don't let them become extremely hostile or frightened. Close the door if this situation gets out of hand. As the animal's curiosity gradually overcomes their initial fear, increase the frequency and duration of "cracked door" time. Continue alternating rooms and reassuring both animals.

TOGETHER AT LAST

When you think your cats are ready to mingle, open the door and allow them to make their own introductions while you observe from a distance. If the cats become fearful or hostile, close the door. As you did with the cracked door, gradually increase the frequency and duration of "open door" time. Soon, the newcomer should be able to leave its room without their new arrangements within hours or days...others need weeks or months. If you run into a problem, back up to previous stage and move forward again.