

How to Introduce a New Cat to the Home

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Anyone who doesn't like cats has simply never had a cat they understood. Cats are amazingly entertaining and responsive, but they are far more complex than most people appreciate and can be difficult for us to comprehend. Remember, cats are not small dogs. And to expecting them to behave like dogs is simply not going to happen.

Even though cats have lived with people for thousands of years, they are not quite as domesticated as people believe. Their behaviors have worked for them all those years and there is no real value in it for them to change. They are, however, very adaptable and as long as they have their simple needs met, their complex personalities will be at ease. Failing to recognize and meet a pet cat's needs can lead to serious behavioral problems.

How do I introduce a new cat to the household?

Cats are territorial by nature and introducing a new cat to an existing group requires a lot of patience. Most cats can learn to cope with a new housemate, but it's important to allow a period of adjusting to the mere presence of another cat before formal introductions are made. I have had success using crating and room restrictions. (Where cats are sectioned off from one another at first.) Cats seem to sense the presence of another, often before they see them. For a cat, sound and smell are as important as actually seeing each other. The introduction process should be very gradual, over a couple of days to weeks at the very least. Your current cats will be naturally curious about a new smell in a closed room.

When you first bring the new cat home

- Move the new cat to a small room, e.g., a spare bathroom and open the cage. The door to this room should be kept closed, and the room should contain a litter box, dry food, water, as well as comforting objects like a scratching post,

comfortable bed and cat toys. Leave the carrier open on the floor so the new cat can retreat there if she feels threatened.

- Observe your cat's response. Undoubtedly, she will be drawn to the door by the sounds and smells of the new cat. The new cat will likely start to reach under the door, which will provide a contact opportunity for them. Leave the new cat confined to the room overnight
- The following day switch the rooms around and let them each get accustomed to each other's smell. Switch their bedding for the same reason.
- Make certain that litter pans are kept clean and water and fresh food are available at all times. Play with and handle each cat when the other is out of the room to minimize territorial jealousy. *[Editor's note: Don't be surprised if your cat initially rejects you a bit after you've handled the new cat. Don't push it. Eventually your resident cat will get more used to the smell and let you approach or pet her.]*

The first, visual introduction of cats

Try to avoid any stressful situations during the first meeting that will initiate inter-cat aggression (first interactions are difficult to forget). Make sure to prevent injury to the cats and to yourself.

A good way to accomplish the first, visual introduction peacefully is to:

- Bring the new cat(s) in a carrier to meet your other cats and sniff each other through the carrier wire door.
- Place the carrier on the floor and allow them to meet this way several times a day for about an hour.
- Continue these meetings for several days or until they remain calm in each other's presence.

You can also:

- Place a carrier initially out of sight of the resident cat, e.g., an entry or mud room. (Your cat will almost certainly respond but not be able to react in fear.)
- Move the carrier, with the new cat still confined, into a room where you can observe reactions. (At this stage, there will almost certainly be

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some vocalization and hissing. The carrier will prevent any harm to either cat.)

- Try to reassure the resident cat by remaining calm and perhaps offering a favorite treat or wet food.
- Remove the carrier out of site for a couple hours.
- Repeat the process.

Final introductions

- Once the two cats seem unconcerned about one another you can start leaving the doors of the rooms open and allow the cats to actually meet with you observing them. Do not leave the cats alone together until they really accept each other.

Though these techniques may work best with kittens and certainly with gentle adult cats, with a little patience, most cats can accept the presence of each other as long as they're not forced together, and they're provided with their own environment and enrichment.

There are bound to be some tense moments, but if you handle it right, you'll be rewarded with the company of two cats. Now you can turn off your television and enjoy watching your cats interact playfully and peacefully.

If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian -- they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.