



Introducing A New Cat to the Resident Cat

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We can't force our pets to like each other. But while we can't necessarily predict whether or not our pets will be friends, we do have techniques that will increase their chances of success.

First, try to choose a cat with a similar personality and activity level to your current pet.

Second, remember not to rush the process. Go slow during the introduction period to keep stress at a minimum and to allow the cats time to get to know one another on their own terms. The more control they feel they have in the situation, the more accepting of it they'll be. Resist the urge to force things.

Things may not go perfectly right away! Cats are territorial and in general they don't like to share, a cat who's unhappy about a newcomer may express his displeasure by fighting with the other cat or marking territory (peeing on the floor, wall or objects). Cats also dislike change, and a new cat in the house is a very big one. Be patient. Let them learn about each other through small, controlled exposures at first. Details are below. And remember, the introduction phase can take anywhere from a few days to a few weeks, or even a few months in some cases.

To allow time for the newcomer to adjust to you and her new situation, keep her in a small room with her litter box, food, water, scratching post, toys and a bed for several days to a week.

- Feed your resident pets and the newcomer on each side of the door to this room, so that they associate something enjoyable (eating!) with each other's smells. Don't put the food so close to the door that the animals are too upset by each other's presence to eat.
- Gradually move the dishes closer to the door until your pets can eat calmly while standing directly on either side of the door.
- Try to get your pets to interact with a toy. Tie a toy to each end of a string, then place it so there's a toy on either side of the door. Hopefully, they'll start batting the toys around and maybe even batting paws.
- Be sure to spend plenty of time with your new kitty in her room, but don't ignore your resident cat.

To animals, smells are far more important than appearances, so you want to get your pets used to each other's scent before they meet face-to-face.

- Swap the blankets or beds the cats use, or gently rub a washcloth on one cat's cheeks and put it underneath the food dish of another. If there are more than two animals in the house, do the same for each animal. When the pets finally do meet, at least their scents will be familiar.
- Once your new cat is using her litter box and eating regularly while confined, let her have free time in the house while confining your other pets to the new cat's room. It's best to introduce your new cat to a room or two at a time and increase her access to other rooms over a few days. This switch provides another way for them to experience each other's scents without a face-to-face meeting. It also allows the newcomer to get familiar with her new surroundings without the other animals frightening her.
- You can do this several times a day, but only when you're home to supervise. If you have to leave the house, put your new kitty back in her room.
- Next, after you've returned the cats to their designated parts of the house, use two doorstops to prop open the dividing door just enough to allow the animals to see each other.
- Repeat the whole process over a period of days—supervised, of course.

Eventually, the cats will be ready to meet face-to-face and then, there may be some kinks for them to work out. If things go very smoothly, the cats may do some mutual sniffing and grooming, and you're on your way to success. They may sit and stare at each other. You can provide distraction by dangling toys in front of them at the same time. This may encourage them to play together. They might sniff each other, hiss and walk away. That's to be expected. This may go on for a few days or so, and then you'll probably find them both sleeping on your bed.

If things go less smoothly, the cats may be very stressed. They may only posture and make a lot of noise. But, as soon as there are signs of increasing aggression (flattened ears, growling, spitting and crouching) make a loud noise by clapping your hands or throw a pillow nearby to distract them. If the standoff continues, very carefully herd them into separate parts of the house to calm down. This could take up to 24 hours, and the cats may take out their stress on you...so, use caution!

If the cats fight repeatedly, you may need to start the introduction process all over again and consider getting advice from a vet or animal behaviorist.

Note: Never try to break up a cat fight by picking one cat up. You're bound to get hurt.

There are other things you can do to help ease tension between feline roommates.

- Have your cats examined by your vet before introductions to make sure they're all healthy.
- Have one litter box per cat plus an extra one.
- Try to keep your resident pets' routine as close to what it was before the newcomer's arrival.
- Make sure all cats have a "safe" place to escape to.