

Multi-Cat Households

BEFORE YOU ADOPT A SECOND CAT

CONSIDERING A SECOND CAT?

Because their social organization is somewhat flexible, cats can be relatively tolerant of sharing their territory with multiple cats. However, it's not uncommon for a cat to tolerate some cats and dislike others. Some cats are unusually territorial and may do best as only cats. Fortunately, cats who don't get along will usually learn to stay out of each others way to avoid conflict.

ENVIRONMENT

Living with multiple cats in a household can be an interesting and positive experience. However, since our feline friends are of the territorial nature and tend to place great importance on physical place and environment, managing a multi-cat household can be a very complicated task! Successful accommodations must be made for multiple kitties, and those accommodations involve respecting the physical and emotional needs of each cat, as well as arranging your home accordingly. Overcrowding stresses cats out. Make sure each one will have a comfortable amount of space. Let your cat be the judge of how much space she needs. Some cats do require more space than others.

MAKING THE MATCH

When introducing a new cat into your household, think first of your resident cat's personality and preferences. Some adult cats may find a kitten extremely irritating. Some younger cats may be on the shy side and have a hard time adjusting to a multi-cat household. Males generally tend to coexist just fine with either sex, while females almost always do better with male cats in the household. If you are in doubt, always choose a cat of the opposite sex from your existing cat. Male and female cats are more likely to view each other as companions rather than competition.

INTRODUCING CATS

As with allowing a new cat to adjust to a new home in a small, confined space, you should absolutely do the same for a new cat who's going to a home with a resident cat. If at all possible, don't place your new cat in your resident cat's favorite room. Be sure to allow your new cat to adjust to his new environment for at least one week before attempting to introduce your resident cat. Below are some tips to help with new introductions.

- ✓ Feed your resident cat and new cat right near the common door of the new cat's sanctuary room, but do not open the door. Your goal is to associate the smell of the other cat with something positive.
- ✓ Switching bedding between cats allows each cat to become further accustomed to each other's scent. Make the experience a positive one by putting treats or catnip on the bedding, or playing with your cats on or near the bedding.
- ✓ After the confinement period of a week or more, switch the cats and let them explore each other's territory. Be sure you don't let them see each other at this time – you will want to let them explore each other's territories interference-free. After a while, place each cat back into his initial territory.
- ✓ Place your new cat in a plastic cat carrier with as much visibility as possible. Put the carrier in as neutral a spot as possible, and let your resident cat come meet the newcomer at her own pace. Don't force an introduction! Remember that cats are resistant to change and love doing things on their own terms.
- ✓ Do not reward for hissing or growling, but don't reprimand for it, either. Hissing and growling are natural ways for felines to communicate, so it is important to ignore this behavior. At the same time, be sure to praise for

positive behaviors like sniffing without vocalization, trying to play or even just being in the same room without hissing.

- ✓ If there is hissing, growling or swatting, keep their interactions to a minimum until the unwanted behavior subsides. If there is little or no hissing, you can open the carrier and let the cats meet each other face to face.
- ✓ If a cat fight breaks out, use a squirt gun or towels to break up the fight. Separate the cats until they calm down. Be sure not to give them attention during their cool down period, because attention could encourage the cats to continue fighting.
- ✓ Keep in mind that it can take six or more months for cats to get used to each other and establish a relationship. Be patient! Cats like to take their time changing, being creatures of habit.

TIPS FOR MULTI-CAT HOUSEHOLDS

- ✓ Cats that are not spayed or neutered will upset the balance of any household.
- ✓ As with humans, three can be a crowd! A household with three cats may easily turn into two against one!
- ✓ It is common for cats to fight over food and litter. Make sure there is at least one of everything for each cat in your home.
- ✓ Some cats will eat competitively. Keep an eye out for this because it could cause weight gain.
- ✓ Don't forget to think vertically! Cats love high perches, so give them as much vertical space as you can.
- ✓ Make sure each cat has enough toys to play with and gets enough exercise!
- ✓ Provide each cat with their own bedding and sleeping quarters.
- ✓ Be sure to give each cat in your home the same amount of attention and affection on a daily basis. Never show favoritism among your cats. Playtime, feeding and attention must all be distributed equally.

KEEP THEM SEPARATED

DO NOT leave your existing cat and your new cat alone unsupervised. Confine your new cat whenever you cannot supervise them until you are 100% comfortable that there will be no conflict when you are not present to manage and intervene. It is far better to err on the side of caution to prevent tragedy.



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