

Planning to add a cat to your household?

The introduction process is all-important. First impressions can be lasting impressions for felines. In the wild, cats take great care to prevent chance encounters with other cats through scent-marking behaviors. By "reading" the marked areas, cats can tell who was there last and at what time he visited the spot. The territory can then be used by different cats at different times of the day--the feline version of time-sharing. In order to get your cat used to the idea of sharing the home turf with another feline, a gradual introduction is essential.

Time and patience are the keys to successfully introducing a new cat into the household. The new cat should have a room of his own for a few days. Exchange the new cat's bedding with that of the resident cat so that they can become acquainted with each other through the all-important sense of smell before they have the opportunity to see each other. Next, rotate rooms. Let the new cat explore the rest of the house while the resident cat spends some time in the new cat's room. When they are relaxed about this step, crack the door of the new cat's room so that they can see each other, but can't push the door open.

Give the cats treats on both sides of the door. Two small toys joined with a several inches of string and slipped under the door will encourage parallel play. When the cats are calm in each other's presence, it is time to let the new cat out for a few minutes. The length of the visits can be increased gradually each day. This process may take a few days or a few months depending on the personalities of the cats. Usually it takes less time when one of the cats is under four months of age.

Throughout the introduction process, speak quietly and calmly to the cats. Praise them generously when they are tolerant of each other's presence. Never scold or use harsh tones when they are together or they will associate unpleasantness with being near each other. Give special attention to the resident cat as it is this cat's territory that is being invaded and it is this old friend who is likely to need the most reassurance. Until they become friends, give the new cat loving attention only when the resident cat is not around.

If at any time the cats become fearful or hostile, return the newcomer to its room and close the door. A minor setback will not ruin the budding friendship, but a fiercely aggressive encounter will be remembered for a long time and should be avoided at all costs. Whenever you run into a problem, back up to a previous stage of the process and then move carefully forward again. Only you can determine the pace of the introduction process. The time you spend gradually habituating your cats will eventually be rewarded with years of harmonious feline companionship.

~ courtesy of Cats International