



Introducing Cats to Cats

Cats, by nature, are solitary creatures. Feral cats will form colonies, composed of related females, in areas with plenty of food. A new cat is frequently viewed as a competitor and threat. Putting a new cat into a household without a gradual introduction is often a recipe for disaster. Cats don't like to share and cats don't like change.



Unfortunately, there is no way to predict which cats will welcome a newcomer and which ones will hate it. Cats have their own

personalities just as people do. Just as there are certain people you don't like spending time, your cat may dislike another cat. If this is the case, tolerance between them may be the best you can achieve.

However, separating them at the beginning and allowing them time to get used to each other gradually can go a long way in helping them accept each other.

Plenty of resources

Cats feel content and in control when there are plenty of resources for them. Resources are all the things the cat needs to survive and be comfortable. Litter boxes, food and water dishes, toys, beds, plus climbing and hiding spots are all resources your cat needs.

Your job is to convince them there is plenty for everyone. That means providing enough of everything in multiple areas around the house. The more cats you have, the more important this becomes.

A rule of thumb is a litter box for each cat plus one extra. They need to be in multiple locations to prevent one of the cats from litter box "guarding". This is a cat bully technique, preventing another cat from using the box.

Several climbing trees and towers are important. It helps if the trees have multiple perches. Cats need high areas to feel secure and you need enough spots so each cat can easily find one for himself. Several beds in different areas, especially in areas where you spend time, are desirable.

Having enough resources for all cats so they don't feel they have to share or compete for them reduces stress. It can also help your cat be more willing to accept the newcomer.



A room of his own

New cats should be in their own room when they first come into your home. This allows everyone to adapt slowly to each other and will usually make the process easier. The room needs to have all the amenities: a litter box, food, water, toys, scratching post and a climbing tower. He'll also need a bed with a blanket or towel.

Every day you exchange the bedding from the new cat with the bedding used by your other cats. Add to it, some unwashed clothing of your own. You can also rub a cloth on the new cat's cheeks and place it under the food bowls of the resident cats.

This allows all the cats to get used to all smells in the house and accept them so you can be one big happy family! Well, at least, that's the plan.

Switch rooms on the cats. Allow the new cat to have access to the house while you put the other cats in the newcomer's room. This allows everyone to spread his scent in all the rooms and the new cat can get used to the rest of the house.

Introductions

If there is enough space under the door to the new cat's room to stress one of the cats, put a rolled-up towel under the door for a few days. This allows them to smell and hear each other, but from more of a distance.

Feed meals on either side of the door. Start this far enough away that everyone is content while eating. Gradually move the food bowls closer to the door. Feed treats near the door as well.

You can encourage them to play with a toy near the door. Tie a toy on either end of a string and place the string under the door. Cats on either side of the door have a toy to play with. It's a good sign if they are comfortable playing that close to each other.



When the cats are comfortable on either side of the door, open the door a crack so they can see each other. Put a block

on either side so the door can only open an inch or two. You can also put up a screen.

Some treats on the floor may help when the door is first opened. If any cat hisses, growls, runs or acts afraid or aggressive, you've gone too fast. Close the door and give it more time. On the other hand, if the initial introduction goes well, the cats will be curious and checking each other out. Open the door a little wider next time without allowing them to move past the door.

Once you are sure all the cats are comfortable with this, you can introduce them face-to-face. All cats should be on harnesses and leashes or in carriers to give you control in case it doesn't go well. Allow them to be near each other in the same room.

Continue to keep a close eye on their reactions. If all goes well, they are ready to be free. If not, then go back to having them separated with a couple inches of doorway open. Some cats just need more time.

Some products help reduce anxiety and can encourage your cats to accept each other. A pheromone, Feliway®, is a copy of the facial pheromone that cats use to mark their territory. It gives them a sense of security and will often help them to accept other cats. Use enough of it so the cats are exposed to it continuously for at least a month. You can also speak with your veterinarian about supplements or medication.

Not all cats will want to engage with a new cat. Some will ignore the newcomer and tolerance is the best you will ever achieve. This is acceptable as long as none of the cats is stressed because of another cat's presence.

Summary

The most common mistake people make is moving too fast to introduce cats to each other. Cats that are territorial when other cats come near the house outside may not accept a new cat readily.

You must take it slowly and follow your cats' lead. They are the ones who will decide when you can fully integrate another cat. It usually takes several days to several weeks before you can allow cats together. However, in some cases it will take months. It can take even longer before they are completely comfortable with each other.

Be aware it is always possible a resident cat will never accept a new one. In some cases, there is ongoing aggression or stress. Consulting with an animal behavior specialist may help.

Unfortunately, though, often your only choices are to either keep the cats permanently separated, or find a new home for one of them. Realize, though, you haven't failed. Some cats are just that way.

