

## Introducing a new cat to the household

Before bringing a new cat into your heart and home, ask yourself, "Why do I want another pet?" Two pets are not necessarily just as easy or just as much work as one. Another cat will require time, energy, expense and patience. Many people who do not have enough time for one cat think that two will be better because they will keep each other company. If you think a second pet will help alleviate loneliness, boredom or behavior problems with your resident pet, think again. If you don't have time to spend with one cat, you surely will not have time to spend with two. Many pet owners end up with two bored and misbehaving cats instead of one. Furthermore, a second cat will not necessarily provide your first pet with the companionship you have in mind.

### **Adding a New Cat**

When selecting a new cat, try to find one that has lived with cats before. It is best to introduce a cat that is different in age and sex to the resident cat. Fighting usually occurs between cats of the same sex and age, especially between toms. While cats of the opposite sex get along best, they should be spayed and neutered. Generally, your cat will best accept a kitten. However, if your cat is a senior citizen, spare it the nuisance of a rambunctious youngster and get it a mellow, adult companion. Try to match personalities. If your cat is a spitfire, then she will probably love another active cat or kitten, not a couch potato.

Have a friend bring the new cat in a carrier to your house. Set the carrier down and see what happens. If the cats try to attack each other through the carrier, the relationship is probably not going to work. If they seem to get along or are cautiously curious about each other, it will most likely work.

Keep your new cat confined to a single room for a few days. This allows the newcomer the opportunity to familiarize himself with the room, which will become his safe haven and personal territory. Provide a litterbox, food/water dishes, toys, bedding and a scratching/climbing post in his room. It is essential that your new cat feels secure in his new territory and has bonded with you before meeting your resident cat and adjusting to your entire house.

When your new cat seems to be adjusting to you and his new room, you can start to familiarize the cats with each other. Start off by letting them get used to the smell of each other. Bring a piece of the resident cat's bedding into the new cat's room. Take some of the new cat's bedding and put it where your resident cat can smell it. Keep exchanging and rotating their beds or a towel that covers a favorite sleeping area. Let the cats sniff each other from under the door. Give both cats plenty of opportunity to adjust to each other's scent. If neither cat acts like it wants to break the door down and kill the other, then it is time to begin leaving the door open.

The new cat will eventually creep out and meet the resident cat. What usually happens is that they will both freeze, arch their backs, hiss, spit and even growl at each other. Then they both flee to safety. Should they have any squabbles, the newcomer can retreat to his own room. The resident cat will be less likely to enter because the room bears the scent of the newcomer. The security and familiarity of the newcomer's own room will help rebuild his confidence to venture forth again.

Don't force your new cat and resident cat to meet. They will do so on their own when they are ready. Don't shower your new cat with attention in front of the resident cat until he is well accepted as part of the family. Don't be upset if the new cat or your resident cats remains in hiding for a few days. This is a cat's normal way of dealing with stress and adapting to new situations. Most of their first encounters will appear hostile to you, but it is best not to interfere. Let them work things out by themselves. They will understand and get to know each other much more quickly if you do not confuse the issues by taking sides or adding to the tension.

There are many factors to consider when choosing a companion for your resident cat. But, the number one consideration should be for the new pet and yourself. Do you have the time it will take to deal with not only being a matchmaker but also a caregiver and supervisor? By being realistic and honest about your needs and constraints, you will be in a good position to decide whether or not to add a second pet to your household.

The majority of cat owners I know who adopted companion pets were highly motivated to do so and now are truly delighted living as a two and even three-pet family. If you already own a cat, and are happy with her, a second cat will most likely be the "purrfect" choice for you and your resident cat.