

Integrating a new pet.

Can we just firstly say there is no guarantee that a resident cat will accept a new addition into your home, but here are a few useful pointers and tips that may help in a successful integration. A large percentage do, however, learn to accept each other and become the bestest of friends :)

It's very important to allow a new addition a period of time away from other pets in the household. A spare room is ideal. This provides them a quiet place to calm down, and get used to the smells of their new surroundings without fear of another cat/dog making an unannounced appearance. Make sure they have easy access to their food, water and litter tray. (It's a good idea to place them in their tray and scratch their front paws in the litter as soon as they arrive, so that they know where to toilet). Enter the room quietly, often, and alone. Maybe get down to floor level so they realise you're not a threat. Just sit and wait; they will come to you if they choose to, (especially if you bring them something super yummy). They may not be used to being handled by humans dependent on their age and history.

We use scent familiarization as a good way to start to introduce new felines. Cats noses are very sensitive, and they will already be aware of others in the house. Use a towel or a blanket to rub over your resident cat and place in the room along with the newcomer. Just leave it on the floor and they will investigate - they have to being extremely nose little souls!!! Once you are confident that the new cat is a little less stressed, repeat the process with his scent, and place in your resident cat's area. Usually they will be stood right outside the door already!!!

Please do not rush these steps! Get to know the new cat/kitten yourself primarily before attempting to integrate with your resident pets. This will make for an easier transition in the end, with a much better outcome - more confident, less stressed cats in the house.

After a few days you can try room swapping your cats. I.e. bring the new feline into the resident cat's space and vice versa for a period of time. However, no contact still at this point! It's very important to allow each of them space and time to adjust to new smells, sounds and a stranger in their home. This also gives them a chance to put their scent around each other's rooms without fear of an attack from anywhere.

Once you and they are a little more confident you could supervise a viewing! Use a slightly ajar door whereby they can just about see each other but cannot physically touch. (Some owners use a baby gate for this stage). There will be a bit of hissing and arching backs no doubt, but do not panic. This is all part of the introductions and is a basic instinct letting each other know of their existence, and possibly starting to sort out who's top cat. The cats will also pick up on your stress so remain calm, and remember this is early days! Try to keep this up a few times a day to get them used to each other.

After a week or so feed them either side of the door. Keep it shut at first then maybe ajar; you will have hold of the door so no chance of them actually getting to each other.

Assess the situation every step of the way. If there is lots of hissing or yowling then close the door and try again at feeding time. Patience will eventually give you a good result for everyone. If you are tempted to rush through the steps, remember that the result you want is you all spending the rest of your lives living in the same house together peacefully - what's a month on the scale of that?

A Feliway plug in can be of great help but needs to be plugged in a week or two before a new arrival. Sometimes you simply don't have that much notice to prepare. Many people use alternative products with great results and they can be bought online or in shops at varying prices. Valerian drops, Valerian Teabags, Rescue Remedy and Serenum drops can help. Please read up on these products possibly before getting your new addition, and consult your veterinarian.

It may take from 2/3 weeks or even up to six months for an integration to be fully successful. There is no set time for introductions of new animals!! We would suggest having some treats on hand, and if needs be a water spray just to diffuse a situation if necessary, and see how things go. A laser pen can also be used to distract cats whilst they get closer.

If the cats do start to fight, please do not attempt to stroke or pick up a hissing cat. When a cat has their ears down and back, they may bite and scratch you without realising you are not the threat. Separate the cats as quickly and safely as possible, and give them chance to calm right down again before you try again to integrate. Don't be afraid to go back a few steps if necessary. It can be done and this is the stage most people give up at and decide to rehome because they are not getting along. It all takes time and patience and will happen given a chance :)

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