



Introducing a New Cat to Cat Already at Home

Cats have a reputation for being anti-social loners, but is that really deserved? The fact is that they not only need time with their human families, but they are perfectly capable of—sometimes even crave—having buddies of their own species. The trick is giving them time to adjust to anything that wasn't their choice. A major key in this is making sure each cat has adequate access to their important resources.

Of course the easiest way to ensure your cats can tolerate each other is to give them plenty of space in the beginning. Depending on your home set up, that might mean keeping one upstairs and the other downstairs, using doors to separate one side of the house from the other, or even putting the newer kitty in a safe and stocked room of her own. Cats naturally like small spaces, so don't feel like your cat will be offended if she spends some time alone in a small bedroom or bathroom. Make sure time with you is special, giving her time to adjust to you and her new home peacefully by not forcing yourself on her in anyway, but letting her approach you and rewarding her with fun games and tasty treats. Remember that you're adding to the family for time with you, not for your other cats! While she's getting used to her new house, she's learning that you're safe and fun. And then you can start introducing her to the existence of your other cats – but not the cats themselves!

First you'll take something your current kitty has been sleeping on or playing with, and put it in the space where your new cat is staying. Take something of hers and give it to your established cat. They can start getting used to each other's scent this way. Overnight, or perhaps a day when you're out of the house for work, switch the cat's areas, so they are still separated from each other, but can explore and get used to each other's smell. Give them separate areas for food, water, and litterbox time without forcing the other cat on them (and try to have at least one more box than cats, so there's always an option). In time, you may be able to combine food and water stations, but you'll always want to have plenty of litterboxes. The transition could take weeks or months; it's worth taking it slow.

If cats who have lived together for a while start to have difficulties (which sometimes happens if one has been away at the vet, or if there are other major changes in the household) reintroduce them as though they'd never met, following the plan above. Whether this is the first introduction or not, never move the cats closer together until both are comfortable. No one should be slinking around, no puffed up fur or bottle-brush tails; you want soft, comfortable body language at all times. If you don't have that, slow down! Don't forget your cat didn't have a say in this change – let him decide when he's ready to accept the decision you made.