

A New Cat

The animals we have chosen to keep as pets are often social animals that benefit from and enjoy the company of others.

Cats are frequently described as solitary, but observations of cats in the wild and in our homes indicate that cats prefer to live in a family group although they can hunt alone. Domestic cats without the support of human families live in groups consisting of a mother and her siblings and their offspring. In fact, mothers nurse the offspring of their daughters (their “grand-kittens”) along with their own litters. Observations of cats bringing food to young kittens or injured companions are common. However, cats guard their territory from new cats they don’t know.

Introducing a new cat to a household in which a cat has already established territory can cause problems with territorial defensiveness. You can prevent this by keeping the new cat or kitten confined to one room with his own litter box, bowls, bed and scratching post for one week. You should use a room in which your old cat does not spend a great deal of time,



such as a guest room or laundry room.

It is important not to disrupt your resident cat’s main territory. It’s also important to choose a room the new cat will enjoy. A basement or attic room that is not used by the family will not have the necessary lasting effect.

While your new cat is in his new room, visit as often as you like but keep the door closed so that your cat and the new cat do not meet. They will know about each other by sound and scent. They may even want to check each other out. However, if you hope to have a long-term relationship develop between the two, a week of isolation is a small price to pay.

Once the cats are used to the new routine (usually about a week), take the new cat in a carrier to another part of the house and allow your old cat to explore the room in which the

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new cat has been staying. After a period of time, say 15 minutes, put both cats back on their respective sides of the door for one more day.

The next day, leave the door to the new cat's room ajar. Ignore the cats. You may hear hissing and even growling. Ignore it. If you are intent upon watching and overseeing the cats' interaction, it will increase the intensity of the introduction. This can have a bad influence on the first interactions. Do your best to act uninterested. In a few days, the cats will have worked out a schedule so that they share some time together and spend some time apart. If the new cat is a kitten and is seeking to play with the old cat most of the time, be sure the old cat can retreat to a separate area where the new cat cannot follow. This can be accomplished by having the new cat spend some time closed in his room each day or by installing a magnetic cat door in your home and allowing only the older cat to wear the access collar. As long as cats can control access to their territories, they will be able to enjoy each other's company.

If you are introducing a cat to a home with a dog, follow the same procedure. You may want to add a baby gate to the cat's room when you open the door, to prevent the dog from entering the room. This will give your new cat a secure place to go and he can build a relationship with the dog over time.

