

Does Your Single Cat Need a Feline Companion?

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Since the death of our Tipper-Cat almost three years ago at the age of 19, our large neutered male Buffett has been our sole cat. Until recently we haven't been emotionally ready to consider obtaining another cat. Buffett now lives with our two Dalmatians, Ashley and Mocha.

Buffett and Mocha are buddies, but Buffett and Ashley have a love-hate relationship. They love to harass one another, but neither is afraid of the other. Tipper and Buffett tolerated each other but never formed a close, friendly relationship.

Like many owners of single cats, we wonder if Buffett needs a companion. He's left alone with the neighbors looking in on him when we take the dogs camping or on frequent visits to friends in Gunnison or our land near Westcliffe.

Buffett is an extremely sociable cat when it comes to people, but we aren't sure how he would react to another cat in the house. Although our desire is to have a friend for Buffett, as we also tell our clients, we know that we must be prepared for a different outcome.

Not all cats are going to be buddies. Individual cats have a wide range of social tolerance for living with other cats. Some are happiest as single cats, while others seem to do much better with a playmate.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to predict ahead of time what type of relationship any two individual cats will form with each other. Just because two cats get along fine, doesn't mean either of them will like a third individual. Here's some of the things that we advise people to consider, and that we are also thinking about as we decide whether a second cat is in Buffett's best interest:

1. What is the cat's previous experience (if any) with other cats? Has he demonstrated the capability to get along, or does he go berserk if he even sees another cat out the window?

2. What type of temperament or personality does the cat have? Is he easy going, adaptable and self-confident? Is he skittish, nervous, shy and doesn't adjust well to change?

3. How sociable is the cat? Although friendly behavior toward people doesn't necessarily predict friendliness toward other cats, it still may help to objectively consider if the cat is more of a 'loner' than not.

Because Buffett is a large (17 pounds) male who isn't easily frightened, we know that a second cat needs to be large enough to not be intimidated by Buffett. Recent research shows that gender is not predictive of whether cats will form a friendly relationship, so we could consider either a male or female. We'll probably choose a cat slightly younger than Buffett who is about 9 years old. Physical appearance isn't a big consideration for us, although like most people we tend to like cats who resemble ones we've had before. We also know that we must be prepared for a potentially long introduction process. The same study found that cats often don't show many friendly behaviors toward one another until they have lived together for eight months or more. We'll address introducing cats to one another in our next column.

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