

Introducing a New Cat to Resident Cats
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Recently we were invited guests on a radio show about animals and had several listeners ask us about the best way to introduce a cat into a household with other cats. Cats aren't always as tolerant as dogs in welcoming new members to the household. How you go about introducing the new cat to the resident animals can make a big difference in how they will get along over the next few years.

For cats, first impressions of others seem to be very important and can color their relations with other animals for years. As a result, first encounters must be carefully managed. Proper introductions of new cats to resident cats can prevent conflicts that will be much more difficult to resolve than to prevent. The most important rule is to go slowly. Do not just bring a new cat into the house and see what happens when the resident cats encounter him. In rare cases, this may work out, but more likely than not, the cats are likely to hiss and growl at each other, and be either afraid, aggressive or both.

A better strategy is to immediately confine the new cat in one room at first, such as an extra bedroom, with all the necessities (food, water, bed, scratching post, toys and litterbox). Encourage the new cat and the resident one to approach the closed door from either side so they can smell and hear each other. As they do so, offer each special tidbits or bring out a favorite toy. The idea is for each to associate "good things" with the other, and to become accustomed to one another gradually, rather than all at once.

Next, switch who is where. Put the resident cat in the bedroom and allow the new cat to explore the house for several hours up to several days. The next step would be to prop open the bedroom door an inch or two, and allow the cats to get a glimpse of one another. Continue to use treats and toys, and do not allow any closer encounters until the cats are relaxed while looking at each other, without being afraid or threatening. If either cat becomes fearful or threatening, stop the encounter and shut the door. Try the introduction again sometime later after they have calmed down, and don't open the door as wide. After several of these sessions, the cats can be allowed together for brief interactions. With most cats, this technique of brief exposures works well. Gradually the time together can be lengthened and the cats can be given more freedom together without supervision. If fearful and threatening behavior continues between the cats, you may need the help of an animal behaviorist.

These same ideas apply when introducing any new animals to each other whether they are dogs, cats, birds or mice. Supervise the introductions, make sure there is no fighting or fear, make the experience pleasant for everyone and go slow. Being patient in the beginning can pay off with good relationships later on.