

ADDITIONS

# Cat Family

Two fur balls are often better than one, at least for the felines. Three can sometimes be a crowd. **BY JILLIAN BLUME**

When you put two adult cats together, aligning their personalities boosts success.

Cats that live together often cuddle as they fall asleep.

**C**ats have come a long way from the days they hunted for food in the wild. Though many people still perceive them to be independent loners, domesticated cats are far more social than their feral counterparts. The cats we live with are capable of forming close bonds, both with their caretaker and with other cats in their home.

While some prefer to be the only queen or king of their castle, many thrive when they have their own whiskered bestie. "Some pet owners believe cats are solitary creatures, but I can say from a professional perspective that it's not so," says veterinarian Claudine Sievert, chief editor for [catpet.club](#). "Felines are social animals that love interacting with other species, though some disagreements can happen when they try to team up with their own kind."

Kittens learn a lot from their mothers and littermates in the first few months of their lives. In fact, many shelters have a policy of adopting kittens out in pairs. Adoption often means separating a kitty from its mother, but taking away its siblings to live as an "only cat" can lead to social, mental and developmental problems.

Two incompatible cats living in the same space can be challenging as well. "The best combination is kittens of the same litter," says Sievert. "They play together, stimulating each other physically and mentally." If you are adopting a second kitten from a different litter, she suggests the younger the better: "Take youngsters before they are 7 weeks old."

Pairing adult cats can be much harder. "Adult felines get along better with cats that are younger and the opposite sex," advises Sievert. "The worst combination would be two adult cats of the same sex, females in particular. Two males are more likely to become

friends, especially if they are easy-going by nature.”

If you are seeking a new cat to live alongside an existing cat (or two) at home, choose carefully. Generally, older cats will not appreciate the manic energy of kittens. Consider the established cat’s personality. If the cat is laid-back, shy, elderly or frail, avoid bringing in a party animal. If you already have a party animal, a cat with the personality of a zen master isn’t a good choice.

### THE MULTICAT HOME

“Providing space for all the cats is crucial to making a multicat household work,” says Anna Bartosik, animal behaviorist and founder of the Woofs and Purrs website. “It doesn’t have to mean a bigger house. It’s about providing climbing spaces on multiple levels without dead ends. More cat trees

and shelves that cats can jump on can make a huge difference.”

Cats are territorial animals. Even when they are bonded to another cat, each requires their own kingdom. But that doesn’t mean you need a lot of room. “Providing multiple levels not only on cat trees but also on shelves and other climbing spaces is crucial in multiple-cat households,” says Bartosik. It’s important to provide safe opportunities for cats to hide and snooze. “Variety is the key here. The more spaces you provide, the more likely cats will choose what works best for them without fighting for it.”

Scatter multiple beds throughout the house, especially heated beds or pads. Place deep cardboard boxes, which cats love, in secluded nooks and crannies, under the bed or behind furniture. Provide places

up high for cats to sleep by either placing a bed on top of furniture or investing in a tall cat condo with plenty of high platforms.

Feeding more than one cat can be tricky. Depending on the cat dynamic, it may be best to set up different feeding areas. “It highly depends on the cats and their preferences,” says Bartosik. “Often cats find their own routines and use the same food bowl but at different times.” Some cats may be bullies when it comes to getting their lion’s share. “To make sure all the cats get to eat, it’s important to observe them and notice their reactions. Start with many feeding spots. You can always eliminate some if cats won’t use them.”

Offering plenty of fresh water is essential for health. Change the water frequently, and wash out bowls with hot, soapy water between

## CAT VS. CAT

### When Cats Don’t Get Along

**Sometimes it’s just a sibling quarrel, but when the fur starts flying, human intervention is necessary.**

- **Aggression** If a normally placid cat suddenly becomes aggressive, a visit to the veterinarian is critical. Pain or illness can make a cat strike out. “Take an aggressive cat to a vet so that a specialist can rule out underlying medical causes,” says Claudine Sievert, chief editor for catpet.club. If the cat is healthy, you’ll need to put on your detective cap to figure out a reason for the aggression. “The most common ones are fear, lack of socialization and the battle for territory.”

- **Bullying** When a cat bullies another, it’s a signal that something

is wrong. Sometimes, bullying occurs on the sly as passive acts that make one cat’s life difficult. It may manifest as one cat attacking another without provocation, or acts like guarding food and water bowls, the litter box, toys or even human attention. As soon as you notice it, act: Add more bowls, another litter box, more toys (or duplicates) or additional territory. If cats are fighting, try a diversion: Make a loud noise, throw a soft towel over them or use a spray bottle of cool water, and simultaneously, tell the cat “No!” in a calm, firm voice.

- **Fear** Signals that a cat feels frightened or threatened can include hiding or running away, freezing in place, refusing to use a litter box or attacking humans

or other cats. Sievert says, “To prevent and handle such behavior, slowly introduce her to the fearful situation and provide more hiding spots and perches.”

- **Stress** Cats can suddenly become stressed when there’s a change in their environment such as a recent move, nearby construction or the loss of a family member. Stress can manifest as aggression, fearful behavior, inappropriate elimination, marking or even vomiting. Set up a quiet space for your cat to retreat, like a tent or cave bed. If your cat hides in a nook or corner, make it cozy with some towels or a padded mat. Put a bed in an out-of-the-way room, and play some soothing cat music (yes, there are cat-friendly relaxing soundtracks available).

Best of friends—but they still need alone time to thrive.



If you live in a city apartment, keep the number of cats to two and provide each with a place to retreat.

Each cat needs his or her own bowl for drinking water and an individual dish for food.

In this four-cat family, felines gain separation by hanging out at various heights.

fillings. “It’s best to place water bowls separately from food bowls,” says Bartosik. “Some cats have a preference to drink from running water. I would suggest trying a few different things and places to see what works best.” Pet fountains offer filtered running water that encourage healthy hydration.

A sufficient number of litter boxes is also imperative for a happy cat family. Bartosik advises getting as many litter boxes as cats in the house plus one additional box, and place them in different spots so cats can have their privacy. “Cats will need some alone time even when they are best friends.” Clean the litter at least daily, or cats may decide to find someplace cleaner.

### HOW MANY CATS IS TOO MANY?

The ideal number of cats depends on the size of the home and the owner. More cats mean more time spent caring for them and more money on food, veterinary care and supplies. “As a vet, I wouldn’t recommend keeping more cats than you have bedrooms in a house,” says Sievert. This will allow felines that don’t get along to stay away from each other, have enough space to mark their territory and avoid fights over food or space.

Bear in mind that there’s a big difference between the multicat household and hoarding. “Hoarding isn’t about the number of cats in the household but behavior toward them,” says Sievert. “It’s a mental disorder, defined by keeping too many cats without the ability to care for them but denying this inability at the same time.”

According to a 2016 report by the BBC, the average cat hoarder houses between 15 and 20 cats, though the worst cases had 40 to 50 felines. “The inability to provide care and attention to cats but continuing to ‘collect’ them anyway distinguishes a hoarder from a multicat owner.” 🐾

### MEET & GREET

## Introducing the New Cat

When bringing a new cat into a home with an existing cat or two, first impressions are important. While some cats will just walk into a new home and adapt, many will need space to decompress.

- Find a quiet room in your home where you can keep the new cat safely separated from the resident cat, but where humans have access for social interaction and playtime.
- A room with a door that has an inch or two of space underneath is perfect for feline introductions.
- Set up the room or area with a bed, food and water bowls, toys and a litter box.
- Put bowls on the floor close to the door on both sides for feeding. If one cat won’t eat, move the bowl away from the door, but leave some treats.
- If either cat hisses or growls, you’ll have to take things slow. Continue this process until the hissing stops. If it doesn’t, this match may not work.
- If they are getting along, switch up their spaces so the new cat can explore the home. Let both cats use the other’s beds, bowls, toys and litter box.
- The next step is to let them see each other across a barrier. Watch for signs of stress. If there’s no negative behavior, it’s time for the big meet and greet.