

# BRINGING IN THE NEW

Sheila Faxon of Pound Ridge, New York, writes. "I feel it is cruel to have just one cat -- especially if it's owner is away at work all day--when there are so many cats that need homes. Yet few people, even in the animal rights movement, seem to know anything about introducing a new cat to the other cat(s) in the household."

Although introducing one cat to another is not so challenging, say, as negotiating peace in the Middle East, there are two commandments to remember: The chances of bloodless coup vary inversely with the age and tenure of His or Her Royal Highness (HRH) at home. The time to start planning for a new arrival--what HRH will no doubt consider The Horrible, Unwelcome Guest (THUG)--is before you find a poor shadow of a kitten hunched beneath your car in the garage or before some battered warrior starts hanging around the back door. In short, Gentle Reader, the time to get ready is now.

We begin with the following assumptions: Your present cat is altered. Your present cat lives indoors. You own a carrier in which you transport your cat to the vet every time it sneezes. You have a spare litter pan. Your cat is currently vaccinated for distemper, rabies, feline leukemia, and any other syndrome for which there is a cc of prevention.

If there is no one home weekdays, bring THUG in on Friday night or Saturday morning. Before you do, prepare the room where he will spend some time in quarantine. Do not choose H.R.H.'s favorite sanctuary or resting place for this setting. The idea is to fit THUG into HRH's routine, not to make HRH feel dethroned.

The solitary confinement approach is recommended for two reasons. No one should introduce a new cat without first isolating him for a while, no matter what the feleuk test said. In addition, it will allow THUG to take measure of his new surroundings, before HRH takes the measure of him.

Until your satisfied that THUG is not harboring any contagious disease that did not show up at the vet inspection, he should have no direct and prolonged contact with HRH. For the first few days they can exchange sniffs and resumes from either side of a closed door.

When you feel the time is right--and after you've clipped everyone's claws--put THUG into the cat carrier, open the door to his room, and allow HRH to come in and conduct a pre-screening interview for 15 or 20 minutes. (Be sure to take up THUG's water bowl, food dish and litter pan first.)

Brief, repeated visits like this help to foster the development of social greeting behavior. More than any other kind of social interaction, they will enable the cats to share accommodations peacefully.

Do not be discomfited by hissing, growling, back arching, or big-tail displays from one or both cats at first. And don't fret if HRH goes off his feed or off to the farthest reaches of the house to sulk for a day or two.

After no more than a fortnight HRH and THUG should be ready to try unfettered (but not unsupervised) contact. Bring HRH into the isolation ward for a visit, but this time do not confine THUG beforehand. Put HRH on the floor, retire to a neutral corner, and -- just in case -- have a blanket handy to throw over them, or some water in a glass, squirt bottle, or water

pistol. All should go well, but should a serious fight erupt, break it up with the blanket or water: then grab the nearest participant and return him to his accustomed place. Reinstitute the brief visitations in a day or so, and then attempt the free-range introduction several days after that. And don't expect miracles.

"It may well be," writes Peter Neville, Bsc., and Claire Bessant, Bsc., in the January 1991 *Cat World*, "that you can only hope for a slightly distant but tolerant relationship between your two (cats), not a loving, curl-up-by-the-fire-in-a-heap one." Slightly distant, however, is better than heaping fire on one another.

"I think it would be helpful," Shiela Faxon writes, "to promote the idea that people who have just one cat should adopt another one if they can."

We agree. So why not slip into your vinyl loafers, shuffle on down to the local shelter, and ask to adopt the next cat that is slated for the employee-only room. HRH will eventually get use to the idea. And think of all the good you'll be doing.

At the end of 1987 there were 27.7 million cat-keeping households in the United States. Of those 57.4 percent or 15,903,900 had just one cat. If each of these households signed up for a healthy homeless cat, there wouldn't be any homeless cats left.

If that sounds simplistic, it's only because the best solutions usually are.

-- *Phil and Mary Ann Maggitti*

***Editor's Note:*** Contrary to popular opinion, dogs and cats often get along better than cats and cats. The difficulty, or ease, of the introduction has more to do with the personality of the dog than anything else. The mellower the dog, the more tolerant will be the cat. Overly exuberant dogs may require some restraint during the introductory period, which may last anywhere from a few hours to a few weeks. But unless the dog is truly aggressive, or the cat has been previously traumatized by a dog, they should reach some sort of understanding or accommodation within a reasonable period of time, and may become fast friends. In addition, where dominance becomes an issue, the cat will almost always dominate the dog--especially if the cat is older.