

Preparing to bring a new cat home



Select a room for your cat to adjust in.

As prey animals, cats get a good portion of their sense of safety from knowing where every hiding place and exit in their environment is. Starting your cat out in a single room and allowing them to settle in there before giving them access to the entire house will be much less stressful for your new friend. If you have other pets who've been in the room you've chosen as your new cat's home base, thoroughly cleaning the room so it doesn't smell like another animal's territory will help your new cat settle in.

This room will be your cat's home base. The litterbox, food and water bowls, toys, bedding and cat tree should also be in that room. Once your cat is comfortable with the whole house, you can begin moving the litter box, etc. to more preferred locations.

Cat proof your house.

Take a look at what you've placed where. If you have a whole collection of ceramic figurines on the living room bookshelf, right in front of the window with the best birdfeeder view, move them. If the only climbing options are your curtains or your blinds, provide another option. If you're in the habit of leaving the butter or other food out on the table or the kitchen counter, consider changing that habit. It's a lot easier to start your new cat out creating good routines in the house than it is to change behavior once it has become a habit.

Provide hiding spots

Your cat will likely hide for at least a few days if not a few weeks as it adjusts. This is a normal instinctual response to being in a new environment. Providing hiding spots while blocking off places you don't want your cat to go can prevent your new friend from deciding the best hide is in a little tiny space that's totally inaccessible to you.

Blocking off areas like the under the couch while providing access to things like a hide box in a closet can make it easier to find your new friend and have easy access if you need to. The simplest hiding spots are cardboard boxes with a couple holes cut in them for doors and a soft blanket inside.

Some cats prefer to hide in high spots, while others like low places. Until you know which option your cat prefers, provide both. Not providing a suitable space will not prevent your cat from making one on their own.

Food and water bowls

Many cats react to plastic bowls by developing what looks like blackheads on their chins where their skin contacts the bowl. Ceramic or metal bowls don't cause this.

A cat's whiskers are actually sensory organs. Eating or drinking from a bowl where their whiskers are pressed against the side of the bowl can lead to whisker fatigue from their whiskers sending constant "this space is too small" signals to their brain. Wide shallow dishes are more comfortable for cats to eat and drink from.

Your cat will drink more if the food and water bowls are not next to each other.

The Litterbox

Litterbox should be placed in a quiet, low traffic area of the house. If you have dogs, this needs to be someplace the cat can access but the dog cannot. If you have kids, this needs to be placed away from where children play or hang out.

Cats being frightened or feeling threatened while eliminating leads to litterbox issues. That can look like kids running the room suddenly, another animal in the house approaching the cat while in the box or someone slamming the washer door if the litterbox is in the laundry room.

As a prey animal, cats feel more secure when they have a 360° view so they can easily see if something is approaching. Enclosed litterboxes block a cat's view and are uncomfortable for many cats.

Provide a scratching post

Scratching is a tactile activity where cats scent mark, stretch and keep their claws in good shape. Most cats have a definite preference for scratching surfaces. Basic scratching surfaces include corrugated cardboard, sisal rope or carpet. Some cats also prefer wood or burlap. Cats also have preferences for vertical or horizontal scratching. If you don't know what your new cat likes, starting out with a variety of inexpensive choices to see what your cat prefers is a good option.

Access to windows and other forms of enrichment

If you have windows with a view of trees, birds or birdfeeders, your cat will likely want to watch. If you have windows with pools of sunlight, your cat will likely want to lay in the sun spots. Providing cat trees or furniture that allow your cat access these windows will discourage your cat from making its own access.

As your new friend is settling in, having a white noise machine that plays bird sounds or using kitty TV can help balance out strange new house sounds. Some cats also find comfort in hearing bird calls or voices when their humans are gone for the day or sleeping.