

# Shared Space



Helping all your four-legged family members get along

By Andrea Vardaro

*Thinking of getting a friend for your dog or cat? Tired of being more pet referee than pet owner? Read on for advice on keeping multiple pets under the same roof, without sending you through it!*

**I**ntroducing a new pet to a resident pet should be done gradually. Keep the pets separated for several days to a week, allowing them each access to different rooms of your house at different times.

Dr. Bonnie V. Beaver, a professor at the College of Veterinary Medicine at Texas A&M University, offers these suggestions for pet owners who want to introduce a new cat into a household that already contains one or more cats:

- Put the new cat in a room of her own with food, water, and a litterbox,

and shut the door. You can interact with her, but do not allow cat-to-cat interaction for about a week.

- Next, allow interaction between the cats for short periods of time, then begin increasing the length of interaction as long as neither cat shows aggression.
- Give cats plenty of space and easy access to resources such as litterboxes, food dishes, and climbing or scratching posts.

Helping a new dog get comfortable with another dog is a little different.

Adult dogs that have had positive interactions with other dogs in the past will adapt easiest. When introducing dogs to each other:

- Introduce them in a neutral, open area away from toys and food.
- Remain calm at all times, and praise the dogs for positive interaction.
- Stay with the dogs when they are together until they have proven that they get along.
- Avoid showing favoritism. Give equal attention to all dogs to avoid reactionary behavior problems.
- Introduce multiple dogs individually to the new dog to help prevent the resident dogs from ganging up on him.

- Maintain the schedule you had in place before the arrival of the new dog.

If you are thinking about having both cats and dogs in your household, keep in mind that you may not be able to have a cat in the house if your dog is a hunting breed such as a beagle or foxhound. These breeds “do not do well with small moving critters,” cautions Dr. Beaver, and they may need extra training to get along with cats.

When introducing cats and dogs, follow the same steps for introducing a new cat to a resident cat. Praise the animals for positive interaction. Allow the cat to roam the house while the dog is confined on a leash or kept in a closed room. It is also a good idea to provide the new cat with a room of her own not only during the introductory period but also so it always has a place to escape the dog.

## KEEPING THE PEACE

As with people, the likelihood of incompatibility and conflict among your pets increases with number. Some of the problems that can arise include a diminished bond with the

## WHO IS TOP DOG?

Whenever two or more dogs are together, the dogs will form a hierarchal group structure, with one dog in a leadership role. Most research suggests that you should respect the dominant dog's position and not try to challenge it by siding with the underdog. Chances are, your dogs are happy in their roles. The dominant dog:

- Walks in front of the other dog
- Greets you first or stays closest to you
- Takes objects such as food and toys from the other dog

As the dominant dog gets older or when the younger one matures, their roles may reverse.

## THE BENEFITS OF YOUTH

An older pet's activity level and physical stimulation might be improved by the presence of a younger pet. However, monitoring the pet's interaction with a new puppy or kitten is wise. Younger pets can perk up an older animal but can also stress them out. You can help by directing the younger animal's energy elsewhere (for example, by spending ample play time with the younger pet) so that the older pet can rest.

owner and competition over attention or resources. However, according to Dr. Beaver, the worst conflict that can develop is aggression.

The good news is that you can take steps to help your pets peacefully co-exist. If they do show aggression toward each other, you might want to separate them. After a while, you can

them, squirt them with a water bottle or can of air, or distract them with loud noises. This will give you the chance to separate the pets.

Then, call your veterinarian. Says Dr. Beaver, “When you make an appointment, explain that you would like to spend some time talking about this problem. In most cases,

**45% of U.S. households contain more than one pet.**

—American Pet Products Manufacturers Association



try bringing them together only when they eat so they associate a positive event (i.e., eating) with each other.

Here are some ideas for keeping multiple cats happy:

- Get tall cat trees to utilize vertical space.
- Build runways with ramps that let cats climb and run around.
- Give each cat her own litterbox.

If you have both dogs and cats:

- Keep the cat's food and water dishes elevated.
- Ask your veterinarian or veterinary technician for strategies on making the litterbox a private haven that the dog cannot access.

To prevent food-related aggression among dogs:

- Give each dog his own bowl.
- Keep the bowls several feet apart.

Should an actual fight break out between your pets, it is not usually a good idea to physically intervene. Instead, you can throw a blanket on

the veterinarian will be able to help, or he or she can recommend an animal behavior specialist.”

## A HAPPY, HEALTHY HOUSEHOLD

You want your pets to share everything—except diseases. It is essential that you have any new pet you bring into your household examined by your veterinarian, vaccinated, and tested for communicable diseases, such as feline leukemia virus (FeLV) and feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV), and internal and external parasites. When appropriate, new pets not intended for breeding purposes should also be spayed or neutered.

Health problems can alter interaction among pets. Dr. Beaver advises, “Any time you see a change in behavior, you should talk to your veterinarian to rule out any medical causes.”

Whether you have one pet or a small zoo, keeping your pets healthy will go a long way toward keeping your entire family—four-legged and two-legged—happy. 🐾