

Cats and Dogs

Cats and dogs have different views on life. Can the two species live together peacefully?

Tom Schreck

Posted: Fri Jun 1 00:00:00 PDT 2001

Dreaming of adding a dog to your happy, contented cat household? Worried the fur may fly? You can maintain harmony in your newly expanded pet household as long as you're willing to be patient, responsible and caring.

First, recognize cats and dogs are two different species and they view the world differently, especially in your home.

"Cats are territorial. When you go on vacation, they're just happy to get a post card," says Pam Johnson-Bennett, animal behaviorist and author in Nashville, Tenn. "Dogs are a different story. They want to go with you on vacation. As long as they are with you, they are happy."

Hierarchy Versus TerritoryJohnson-Bennett's tongue-in-cheek comment actually highlights the essential difference in what makes dogs and cats tick. Dogs, being pack animals, look to a leader for guidance, direction and approval. They gladly follow the leader and contentedly accept their place in the household hierarchy.

Cats, on the other hand, are more turf-oriented. And, while they certainly bond with their human companions, cats tend to feel more anxious or defensive than dogs when their territory—namely, your house—gets disturbed or threatened by change or a newcomer. For the unsuspecting new dog entering your home, this can mean trouble.

That's why it is important to understand how dogs and cats socialize before making the introductions, says Larry Lachman, Psy.D. and animal behavior consultant in Carmel, Calif. In his new book, *Cats on the Counter*, Lachman addresses the topic of bringing a new dog into a cat household.

"A well meaning, fun-loving dog may chase a cat thinking it's a playmate. Dogs chase as part of their play," Lachman says. "For the cat, that may mean its territory has been violated and it may defend that territory. This can be very traumatic for the cat. If either animal has not had a previous positive history with the other, then the introduction can be very difficult."