

Can Cats Live in Harmony with Small Animals?

CatChannel expert Jeanne Adlon, professional cat sitter, gives tips for keeping multiple species safe and happy.

By Jeanne Adlon

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Q: Is it possible for cats and smaller animals such as birds, hamsters and fish to live in harmony?

A: I have had several clients with cats who share space with the more exotic variety of pet, and none more so than a tarantula. Yes indeed, I have seen some strange households and this was the scariest. The tarantula was kept in a huge glass tank with a very secure lid — I made certain of that before I agreed to come in and take care of their cat. Fortunately, I didn't have to take care of tarantula! There were so many branches and things in his tank that I never saw him, which was fine by me. But I have to say that every time I thought I saw something out of the corner of my eye I jumped. I got through it though. By the way, the cats name was Buckwheat — I did not ask the tarantula's name.

If you are considering adding a new pet to a household with a cat, I do not suggest a tarantula. However, there are some guidelines to create a safe and harmonious home for small animals that your cat might instinctively be drawn to. First, you need patience and you must be on your guard because every pet needs to feel safe in their home.

If you have birds, hamsters or fish, place their cage in a location where your cat can't tip it over. If they are in a fish tank, and many people keep small animals in fish tanks, make sure it has a very secure top. Provide items in the tank that can act as hiding places so they can relax if need be.

Also, know that trouble can work both ways. Large parrots, for example, have powerful beaks and can cause real damage if your cat gets her paws in a cage. Make sure the cage bars are close enough together to prevent a paw from squeezing in. Lastly, keep your small animals behind closed doors and away from your kitty when you go out. There is no need to tempt the innate curiosity of our feline friends. With preparation and care, you should enjoy a harmonious household. As always, I welcome your comments and stories.