

Cat Personalities

CatChannel behavior expert Marilyn Krieger, CCBC, explains why it's important to research a cat breed before deciding on one.

By Marilyn Krieger

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Q: I have a few domestic cats and I am contemplating getting a Savannah or a Serengeti. I chose these two types because of their pleasant personalities. In your opinion, which one would be most suitable to get along with my domestic cats, and which one would be better to maintain?

A: Before deciding to acquire a particular breed of cat, do your homework, so you can determine what breed will fit in with your life and lifestyle. Most breeds have their own personalities, as well as physical characteristics. One way of finding breed-specific information is to join a cat breed Yahoo group and ask questions. Every cat breed has at least one Yahoo group with knowledgeable members willing to share information about their favorite breed.

Social skills are not a breed-specific trait. All breeds can get along with other cats. It's the individual personalities of the cats that need to be taken into account. If a cat has a tendency to be cranky toward other cats, most likely he will not take to a new cat. Sometimes cats who have lived as only cats for their whole lives would rather not share their home and human companions with another cat. Other cats, after being properly introduced, welcome strangers with head butts and purrs.

Age differences can count. Senior cats typically do not appreciate active youngsters attempting to engage them in play 24/7. Their idea of a good time is to enjoy a nap in a patch of sunlight. Since part of the definition of being a kitten or a youngster is to play, youngsters should be paired up with another cat of equal age and energy.

There are some breed characteristics that do need to be considered. If your resident cat is a relatively inactive cat, such as a Persian, then acquiring an extremely active cat, such as a Savannah or Serengeti isn't a good choice. Savannahs and Serengetis would rather swing from chandeliers and race through the house than sit sedately on the living room sofa looking stately. Size is also a consideration. Savannahs can be large cats, males averaging between 15 to 20 pounds, though the weight can vary. A Serengeti male typically weighs between 10 to 15 pounds, females between 8 to 12 pounds.

Many people are not familiar with some of the exotic cat breeds. Savannahs are domestic cats with a Serval (African wild cat) as an ancestor. Serengetis are domestic cats, created by pairing a Bengal with an Oriental Shorthair. Bengals are domestic cats with an Asian Leopard Cat ancestor. According to Karen Sausman, of Kingsmark Cattery, the developer of the Serengeti breed, Serengeti Cats are more Oriental Shorthair than Bengal hence their personalities are similar to the personalities of Oriental Shorthairs.

Serengetis and Savannahs are very intelligent and very active. Both enjoy gymnastics. It's hard to say which is more active; at times they both seem to fly through the air. Both Savannahs and Serengetis love interacting with people. Sausman says that Serengetis can take a little longer to acclimate to a new home, but once they do, they cling like Velcro to their human companions.

There are lifestyle considerations, too. These cats need to interact with their people and/or another companion. They do not fare well if left home alone every day for hours and hours with nothing to do and no one to talk to.