

## Do Both Male and Female Cats Spray?

**CatChannel behavior expert Marilyn Krieger, CCBC, explains the triggers for cat spraying.**

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**Q:** I currently have a 15-month-old female brown tabby cat named Callie and am considering adopting another kitten. I have heard mixed opinions on whether I should get a female or male. I was always told that male cats spray, but someone recently told me that females are more territorial and might actually be more likely to spray than male cats.

Can you offer any advice on the subject? Callie is not aggressive -- she is more likely to avoid and/or hide from a new person than act in a hostile manner.

**A:** Any mature cat, depending on the circumstances, can spray. Typically, whole (unfixed) male and female cats will spray. Whole males are more likely to spray for territorial reasons and because it lets the receptive queens know they are available for a little hanky panky. When queens spray they are telling potential males in the neighborhood that they are ready for action. Fixing cats will stop cats from spraying in the majority of cases.

Given the right triggers, any cat, including fixed males and females, can spray. Sample situations that can cause a cat to spray include: outside cats; changes in the household; less than ideal litterbox situations; too many cats; not enough vertical territory (tall cat trees); introducing cats too quickly to other household animals; stress; grief; poor urine cleanup; health issues; other whole males/females.

There are factors to consider when choosing a new potential live-in buddy for your cat. For your particular situation, I recommend choosing a male cat that is proven to get along with female cats. Additionally, the personalities of both cats need to be taken into consideration. The new kitty should be around the same age as your resident kitty because some older cats do not have the energy levels that the youngsters have and don't appreciate a youngster incessantly trying to play with them.

Once you choose a buddy for your cat, make sure to introduce them slowly to each other. The introduction period can take a month or longer. The cats should be separated from each other by a closed door while a series of activities is done that encourage the cats to have pleasant feelings and positive associations with each other.

Start the introductions by exchanging pheromones. Gently pet the new cat's cheek and area around his cheek with a clean sock. Do the same with your resident girl, using a fresh, clean sock. Exchange socks, putting them in the other cat's area. This should be done a couple of times a day, each time with a clean sock.

After both cats are comfortable with the pheromone-laced socks, introduce other pleasant experiences while they are kept separated. Simultaneously feed both cats treats and regular meals on each side of the closed door. Encourage them to play under the door with each other with the help of a double-sided toy. After the cats are playing and pleasantly interacting with each other under the door, encourage nose kisses by cracking the door open about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch. Use your foot as a wedge so the door can't be pushed open.

Eventually, you will be able to open the door for short periods of time, allowing supervised visits. Begin this by moving the feeding stations a distance away from the door. The cats should not be near each other while being fed, but they should be able to see and hear each other eating when the door is opened. Open the door and feed them at the same time. After they've eaten, close the door.

Gradually increase the amount of time the door is left opened after they've eaten. Visits should be supervised, and if there are any signs of possible aggression, the cats should be separated and the process taken slower.