

## How Many Cats Should I Add to Household?

**CatChannel behavior expert Marilyn Krieger, CCBC, offers advice on adopting and acclimating a pair of bonded cats.**

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**Q:** Within the past year our 16-year-old cat and 15-year-old dog passed away. We are now thinking of adding two young cats/kittens to our household. My question is: Are two better than one? My husband and I are retired but work part-time three days a week, which means leaving the kitties alone on these days. We thought with two, they might be company for one another. We are also thinking that littermates may be the best bet since they've always been together. Also, will they share a litter pan and food dishes? I would like to have young kittens but maybe a little older would be wiser. Are there any other tips you can give us that would help us choose wisely?

**A:** Two bonded cats are better than one. I definitely recommend adopting a bonded pair of youngsters. They don't have to be littermates, but they do need to have a bond with each other. Cats who are buddies will keep each other company during the day when you are away from the house for an extended length of time.

Do your homework before adopting. Adopt cats who are a good match with your lifestyle. Do you want a cat who is a couch potato or a cat who is highly active and energetic? Do you have the time to groom a long-haired cat every day? Do you like vocal cats who love to communicate, or the strong, silent type? If you are interested in adopting purebred cats, research and find out about the health and behavior characteristics of the specific breeds you are interested in adopting.

Whether you are adopting a cat from a reputable breeder or from a shelter, it's important to meet the cats before making a final decision. Watch how they interact with each other, their environment and, of course, with you and your husband.

Find out if the cats you are interested in adopting are fixed, vaccinated, on a special diet or if there are any health issues you need to be aware of. Ask for copies of health records, if there are any.

Prepare a room for the youngsters. The cats should not be allowed free access to the whole house when you first bring them home. This will be their sanctuary room, where they can start to get to know you and familiarize themselves with the different smells, sounds and sights of their new home. The sanctuary room should have uncovered litterboxes, a feeding station for each cat, water, a comfortable place to sleep and, if possible, a secure window to look out of. After a few days the cats should start feeling secure and bonding with you. When they have adjusted to their new room, you can open the door to the rest of the house so they can explore on their own schedules. If you have other animals in residence, introduce them slowly.

Provide the two youngsters with three uncovered cat boxes, located in different areas of the house. The cat box rule is: one box per cat and one for the house. If you adopt two cats, you will need three cat boxes. Your cats will also appreciate tall cat furniture, scratching posts, horizontal scratchers and plenty of toys.

Check out the cats that are up for adoption from rescue groups and shelters. They should have a bonded pair that will be a perfect match for you and your husband. If you are interested in adopting a particular breed of cat, consider going to a breed rescue group. Every cat breed has a rescue group associated with it. Adopting from shelters and rescue groups saves the lives of wonderful, loving cats.