

## Introducing a new kitten into the household

Hi, I'm Janet Williams, cat lover in the extreme, with a long suffering husband and a house full of cats... well, only six. It's quite a modest number really.

My cat population has been growing since 2001 when I bought a pair of Burmese litter sisters. I now have two Burmese, one Bengal, one Abyssinian and two Egyptian Maus. Within this motley bunch there are five girls and one boy. Their ages range from 12 years down to 4 months.

So you can see that I have some experience of introducing youngsters to older cats

Well, you might ask, how have you done it? What are the golden rules for the seamless introduction of a kitten into an established household of felines?

My experiences over the last 12 years have told me that there are no golden rules, no magic formulae. Each kitten and cat has its own personality, and it is the mix of the various personalities that will determine just how quickly the newcomer settles in.

My first experience came about after we sadly lost one of our two Burmese in 2006. I thought that Tara was missing her sister and I bought Suki, a sweet little chocolate Burmese, to keep her company. I had already arranged to buy two other kittens, a Bengal and an Egyptian Mau which were due to be ready for collection about a month later. Poor Tara didn't know what had hit her. She was aggressive towards Suki, who cowered from her, hiding under chairs and generally keeping out of the way. When the other two kittens arrived, Tara became extremely unhappy. She began to lose weight and started over grooming. Her tummy became quite bare. The vet

suggested keeping her apart from the others. Things went from bad to worse as the kittens chummed up whilst Tara remained upset and angry at the intrusion.

She became a bald shadow of her former beautiful blue tortie self. She was so unhappy that we seriously considered re homing her into a household where she'd be the sole cat.

Almost at the eleventh hour, things started to turn around. The vet had prescribed anti depressants which showed a slight improvement in her demeanor. I begged him for one further course of pills and at the same time brought Tara fully back into the household. This was in November 2006 and by Christmas there was a marked improvement. We breathed a sigh of relief as her coat re grew and she put weight back on. She became a happy cat again.

In 2008 I decided that I'd like a kitten to show. My group of felines were not quite up to breed standards or hated showing (yes, you've guessed it, that is Tara!) I bought a super Egyptian Mau kitten. This time, it was easy. Little Jasmin won everyone's hearts with her gentle disposition and great beauty. She soon snuggled up to her older brother, Tatu, and the pair became friends.



*Baby Jasmin snuggling up with big bro' Tatu*

Later that year, however, we were back to having only 4 cats. Sadly, Tatu died suddenly at the age of 18 months, from a suspected burst bladder.

In 2011, I thought it would be nice to have another kitten to show. Jasmin had enjoyed a brilliant show career, but I felt the urge to diversify and also to give her a bit of a rest.

After some research I settled on a fawn Abyssinian, Kali. Kali is the name for a Hindu princess and it also means 'fierce' in Swahili. The latter definition proved to be most appropriate.

A bombshell hit the household. From the moment she arrived, Kali decided that she was the boss and everyone else better get outta town on the double. She was aggressive in the extreme. Poor Jasmin's eyes were like saucers, nearly popping out of her head when she first met Kali. She immediately went into reverse, and sat outside in the cold of a December's evening, on the other side of the cat flap, flatly refusing to come back in. We had to back track and isolate Kali, introducing her to the rest of the gang in short bursts. Abyss identify with their owners on a one-to-one basis and Kali soon became a bed companion, responding with much purring and affection. This helped, I believe, and still does to this day, in calming her down with a bit of 'me' time when she has the one-to-one attention she craves. To this day she is very much 'the cat that walks by herself' but one that looks forward to her nightly snuggles.

A couple of months ago I had the opportunity to buy a beautiful bronze Egyptian Mau kitten. I could not resist. This kitten, however, is a boy. He has a gentle and loving, if boisterous, nature. When I brought him home I immediately placed him in a cage in the lounge and let the girls see him whilst keeping him in a safe place. Next, I gradually let him have the run of the downstairs, introducing him to one room at a time. After a couple of weeks I felt it was safe enough to let him share the same space as the girls whilst I was at work.

What has surprised me with the latest kitten is that all the girls, without exception, were, at first, simply terrified of him. Jasmin went into reverse again, preferring to seek shelter in the garden than come indoors. Four weeks after his arrival, the two Burmese are happy in his company and have assumed the role of 'aunties', keeping watch over his movements. Saba the Bengal and Kali the Abyss have yet to come round, but both of these cats are loners, so perhaps I shouldn't expect too much, too soon.....



*Charlie and Tara having a conversation*

With autumn nights approaching, I hope that all the felines will start spending more time snuggling up together (especially when the wood burning stove is lit) and peace and companionship will reign.

Wish me luck!

Janet Williams

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