

PET HINTS

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Adding a second pet to your family

63% of Australian households enjoy the company of a pet and while every pet is different, many animals enjoy the company of another. Here's some advice for anyone thinking of adding a second pet to the family.

Dogs and cats can live together peacefully and even become great friends, especially if they arrive at the same time. The younger dogs and cats are when they are first introduced the better. When introducing a dog and a cat for the first time ensure the dog is on a lead, provide an elevated space for the cat to retreat to and reward good behaviour. If you're considering keeping a cat and dog in the same household, keep in mind that there are some breeds of dogs that aren't generally recommended as suitable to be kept with cats.

If you have an older pet, think about your pet's personality to gauge how he or she might react to another animal in the house. If your cat is older and settled, he or she might not accept an active kitten as a playmate. In the same vein, if your dog tends to be anti-social at the dog park, a second dog may not be the best idea.

How to introduce your pets to each other for the first time

When you first bring home your new pet, put them in separate rooms behind a closed door for a while so that your other pet can get to know the new arrival 'through the door'. This way your pets will discover each other through smell and hearing, and when you introduce them face-to-face they will already be familiar with each other.

The most important thing to remember when introducing your pets is to create a controlled situation in an open environment, such as a park or spacious room. Dogs will circle and sniff each other, but may also growl or raise their hackles. This is normal behaviour so try not to interrupt it; it's their way of getting to know each other.

Cats prefer to be introduced more gradually, through a screen or a small opening in a door. Hissing, growling and swatting are to be expected. Once they can encounter each other without the nastiness, it's time to let them fully interact.

Equal love and attention

Each animal should have their own bed, their own toys and their own food and water dishes. Give attention equally and spend one-on-one time with all pets to allow them to bond with you.

In many ways, pets are like children. If you are paying too much attention to one, there can be competition. Make sure your pets know what the rules are for getting attention: being calm and sitting patiently. A video about introducing dogs and cats is available at <http://www.petsinthecity.net.au/tips-successfully-keeping-dogs-and-cats-together>