



Recipe for Integrating a Second Cat

We went to bed prepared for the worst.

Bella and Truman had spent their first day together since Truman arrived. There wasn't much togetherness per se, but with only a few growls from Bella, we felt day 1 went well. Now it was time for us all to retire.

Our apprehension about the nighttime hours stemmed from memories of six years earlier when Bella was new to our household. Having spent time with other cats while she was in BFPA foster care, my husband Tony and I assumed she would ease right into life with Cosmo, our feline resident at the time who was so laid-back we wondered if he even knew how to hiss. When we were jolted from our slumber with what Tony, a horror movie aficionado, described as bloodcurdling screams, we scrambled to separate the two for the rest of the night. What went wrong? What do we do now? Will these two cats ever be friends, or even just get along?

With some helpful suggestions from Missy Ward, BFPA's cat coordinator, Bella and Cosmo eventually bonded and enjoyed six years together. When we adopted Truman, we decided to approach the integration with a strategy.

Like recipes, not all strategies yield successes. We've all had the cake that flopped, or the muffins that didn't rise. But your chances of a favorable outcome are better if you follow a plan.

Here is the recipe we used for integrating Truman into our family:

- ◆ **Prepare a separate room where your new cat can stay isolated from the rest of the household for about two weeks.** We used a spare bedroom with a futon that doubled as a place for Truman to sleep as well as hide under. The room was large enough that food and water could be kept an adequate distance from the litter box.
- ◆ **Spend one-on-one time with your new friend in his private quarters, even if he chooses to hide.** Although we couldn't be there during the day, Tony and I alternated shifts in the evenings, each spending about two hours in the room with Truman. Most evenings, he came out from hiding after about 10 minutes and joined us on the futon.
- ◆ **Do a room swap and scent exchange.** A few evenings during the first week, we put Truman in the bathroom for about 20 minutes while we let Bella sniff around in his room.
- ◆ **Encourage under-the-door paw play.** We occasionally slid our fingers or a mouse toy underneath the door to inspire them to reach out and touch paws.
- ◆ **Allow separated face time.** After the first week, we put a baby gate across the doorway of the spare bedroom and opened the door just a few inches. There were a few hisses and growls from Bella. We eventually opened the door all the way with the baby gate still in place as we supervised the interactions. By the end of the second week, they were touching noses through the gate. We knew it was time to attempt a full-on meeting.

The next Saturday, when we would both be home, we confined Bella to the sunroom and let Truman explore the rest of the house. After a couple of hours, we let Bella back in the house. Like two prizefighters delegated to the far corners of the ring, they stayed at opposite ends of the house for most of the day. We went to bed with both cats having free rein of the house.

I was awakened in the early morning hours. But happily it was a full bladder that woke me, not a cat skirmish. Our recipe was indeed a recipe for success.

