

Hamsters

It can be misleading to see hamsters in a pet shop housed together and assume that they get on well. However, most hamsters are generally best housed alone, particularly Syrian hamsters, who will fight to the death to protect their territory.

It is possible to introduce a dwarf hamster to another but do be prepared to provide an additional cage if the pairing isn't successful. Get one of the same sex and put them into a completely new environment so neither one has established the place as its home. Putting a new one into the home of an established hamster is asking for trouble—a dwarf hamster can kill another dwarf.

Rats

It is recommended that you quarantine any new addition for one to two weeks before introducing them to each other.

A young rat is the best choice for a new roommate for an adult male, but the newcomer should be at least six weeks old. This is because adult males will sometimes kill strange baby rats younger than this. When introducing rats, you should have two cages so the new rat can have his own cage at first.

Place the cages close together for at least a week to allow the rats to get to know each other and, as with hamsters, introduce them on neutral territory and observe their behaviour. Any aggression or hissing will be a sign that the pairing may not be suitable.



In all cases, please seek specialist advice before introducing a new pet to your home environment

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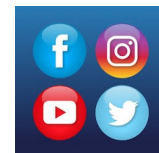
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Dogs

Dogs, by their nature, are social animals. However, introducing a new dog may not be easy and there are several factors that may have an effect on the success of an introduction.

Preparation is important! Scent is a key method of communication for dogs so ensuring that your new dog smells of home before an introduction is made, will help. You can gather scents from the new dog's head by gently stroking them with a soft cloth and dabbing this around your home and furniture to mix and spread the scents.

Introduce your new dog to the other(s) on neutral territory; on a long walk together is a good idea. The walk will make the introduction less intense for them and they can get to know each other as they go along. At least two people should walk the dogs to ensure safety at all times.

When bringing home a new dog, remove anything they are likely to fight over, such as toys or bones. Attention from members of the family may also be a resource to fight over so ignore them until they have settled down. Try to ignore small disagreements and scuffles but be ready to lead the dogs away and isolate each of them until they have calmed down.

Feed your dogs apart until they are used to each other and separate them before answering the door and do not make such a fuss of the new dog that others feel excluded.

Care should be taken not to leave them alone together until it is obvious that they have become friends.

Cats

Cats are by nature, solitary animals but it isn't impossible to have a multi-cat household. If it is managed well and if the cats involved feel that they have their own territory and are able to avoid conflict with other cats, then cats may live quite happily in the same house as each other. The local cat population may also have an impact on how



successful a multi-cat household will be.

Siblings that have been raised together tend to make the best pairings but there are some steps you can take to increase the success of an introduction.

Cats don't share important resources that they need to survive such as food, water, litter trays, beds, high resting places, private areas, scratching posts, entry & exit points and toys. As such, these resources should be provided in sufficient numbers and distributed throughout the house so that each cat can access them without any tension or conflict.



To ensure that any introduction of a new cat has the best chance of success, providing enough resources and distributing them to accessible locations for each cat will help to make for a more smooth transition.

The general rule of thumb is to have one of each resource plus one extra, so for a three cat household it would be recommended to have four of everything.

Guinea Pigs

Guinea pigs are herd animals and find greater safety living in a group. It is best to have at least two and the most suitable pairings are two females or a neutered male and a female. If you want to keep a group of three or more guinea pigs, it's not advisable to have more than one male as any more can cause a conflict over resources.

If you want to introduce an unfamiliar guinea pig to an established group you must firstly ensure that hutch or cage is large enough. Guinea pigs need space to exercise and explore.

Before meeting, it's useful to swap bedding and other items so that they become familiar with their new partner's scent before actually meeting them. It is important to watch for any adverse reactions your guinea pigs might have to the new smell. You can try swapping their hutches or exercise runs so that they can spend time living in each others space.

Next, house your guinea pigs with a mesh that separates them so they can begin to communicate. If this goes well, find a neutral space for them to meet but ensure that you are present

and able to dedicate time to monitor their behaviour. Positive signs are grooming each other, lying next to each other or sharing resources, such as food and water.

Signs of concerning behaviour are teeth chattering constantly, biting directed towards each other and constant hiding from one another and choosing not to spend time together.



If all this goes well, remove any enclosed houses from the hutch and provide open objects to hide behind, such as tubes and scatter food around the hutch and provide two sources of water. Continue to monitor their behaviour in the hutch initially as a new environment can change the dynamics of a relationship.

Guinea pigs and rabbits should not be housed together as they cannot communicate effectively and are likely to be bullied by the rabbit.

Rabbits

Rabbits are naturally territorial BUT also very sociable so should be housed in pairs or more. There is no exact method to introducing a new rabbit to another. Situate their accommodation next to each other so they can size each other up. All initial and direct interactions should be closely monitored so that they can form a relationship in their own time. Rabbits should always spend the night apart during this period until you are happy that they have bonded.

Signs that this has happened are sitting together or grooming each other.

