

Animal Friends Presents Introducing Pet Rabbits to Cats and Dogs

Those who enjoy the company of animals tend to agree: multi-species households are the best. At Animal Friends, we get to know many savvy pet owners who keep happy households with dogs, cats and rabbits living under the same roof.

While canine-and-feline housemates are rather commonplace, introducing a rabbit to dogs and cats requires another degree of care. The key, experts advise, is to introduce your new rabbit with equal parts caution and optimism.

Before you attempt to introduce a rabbit to a cat or a dog, be sure to take your pets' personalities into account. A free-roaming rabbit will not be safe around a rambunctious kitten or a puppy. You also won't want to introduce a rabbit to a former stray who learned to hunt for food, or a dog with a strong prey drive. Do not attempt an introduction with a dog who will not obey commands like "down" and "stay." A calm, adult dog or cat is the best candidate for living peacefully with a bunny.

When you adopt a rabbit from Animal Friends, ask the adoption counselor to test the rabbit around cats and dogs. We won't be looking for a rabbit who buddies right up, but rather, one who demonstrates that she is curious and unafraid.

When you take your new rabbit home, keep her in her hutch for the first week, so she and your dog or cat can introduce themselves through the cage. A rabbit who may run from a dog in the open may feel brave in the cage, and sniff through the bars.

If all goes well, it may be time to make slow, careful and supervised introductions with your cat or dog. Be sure your dog is leashed and under your control. Ensure that your cat's nails have been trimmed, and keep them short with regular care. Make sure the rabbit can always escape to her cage. And, constantly reward the pets for good behavior with treats and praise.

As the pets meet, sniffing, light paw batting and the occasional half-lunge are okay. And, this is important, even after cross-species harmony is established: never leave them unsupervised. Close a door between them if you must turn your back or go out.

Above all else, be patient and take it slow. Your best bet will be to play it cool, and before you know it, you may find your entire furry family gathered around the TV with you.

Skeptics may ask, "Is it natural for dogs, cats and rabbits to live together?" For the most part, your pets will look to you for those clues. There are many dogs who will chase wild rabbits, but not the family pet. It's up to you to teach the pets who is part of the family.

Be patient, and before long, you could be basking in the sweet, sometimes-amusing company of your own multi-species household. Best of all, you'll know that you've eased the burden on animal shelters by providing a loving home for even more animals who need you!

To meet rabbits, cats and dogs who are waiting to be adopted, visit www.ThinkingOutsideTheCage.org.

