

Bonding Rats

Rats are social animals and enjoy living with other rats; they can become depressed if they are alone. They use their sense of smell to recognize others, to find out where they've been and what they've been doing. Rats can develop abnormal behaviors if left without company and nothing to do for long periods of time even with lots of human contact. Rats kept with other rats are just as friendly with people.

Dominance Relationship

When unfamiliar adults are housed together, there may be a period of high aggression. If they establish a dominant relationship, aggression levels should drop. This usually doesn't last long. Fighting between cage-mates is rare but can be recognized when one rat hides from the other, if one rat injures another, or if the attacking rat has raised fur.



Introducing Two New Rats

How do you introduce new rats? All rats are different, just like people. Some are more nervous, some are scared, and some can be bullies. Introducing rats involves adapting your strategy depending on the rats involved.



What You Will Need

Introducing rats does take some patience, experimentation, and precautions that ensure all of your rats are safe. According to one method, there are a few things you will need to help ease the process.

- A neutral habitat or space
- Treats
- Vanilla extract
- Rat-friendly disinfectant



Method for Introduction

Follow the steps below for introducing new rats successfully and safely. Some rats may fight even after a successful introduction. This is a normal part of the process, especially for males where they're trying to establish a pecking order. It's important to know when the fighting is getting out of hand and when to separate them. If blood is drawn, they should be separated immediately.

- **Introduce Their Scents:** To begin with, you should make your rats aware of the new addition. To do this, it is a good idea to introduce both the existing rat(s) and the new one to each other's scents. You can take a small amount of bedding from each of their habitats and place it in the other. Another common method is to introduce the new scents outside of the habitat, so with the rat on your lap, you can let them sniff and play with some tissue that has the other rat's scent on it.
- **Early 'Neutral' Introduction:** When you're ready to introduce the rats for the first time, it's important to make sure it's done in a safe, neutral environment. Keeping the new rat on your lap is a good way to ensure they feel safe, especially if you have more than one rat already. This also demonstrates to the other rat(s) that the new addition is a friend and not just some invader. While it is easier to introduce one rat at a time, it's not impossible to introduce 2 or 3 at once, but be aware that the new rat is more likely to be scared by three rats climbing all over them and possibly even showing aggressive posturing with them. You should reward good behavior by giving them regular treats, verbal encouragement, and stroking them in their favorite place. To begin with, these introductions should be brief, but try not to separate them on a bad note.
- **Increase Duration:** You will want to gradually increase the amount of time the rats can stay around each other without a major incident. Good signs to look out for are grooming of one another, grooming of themselves (which indicates they feel safe), and chittering so you know they're happy.
- **Unsupervised Time:** After your rats have successfully navigated these early introductions, it's time to let them get used to each other without supervision. Using a neutral habitat or a thoroughly cleaned habitat, introduce them to each other in the same enclosed environment. You should spritz them with some vanilla extract as well during this stage to mask any potential smells that might frighten them, especially if this is one of the other rat's habitats to begin with. You won't be directly supervising them, but it is important to keep an eye on them as you will still need to break up any bad fights and reward good behavior with treats. You will need to assess this as you go, but ideally you'll need to be patient and increase the duration of unsupervised time.
- **Permanent Residence:** Once they're used to being in the same habitat for an extended amount of time, they will be able to be trusted in the same habitat overnight or while you're not at home.

What If It Doesn't Work?

While it's unlikely that the following steps outlined above won't work given enough time, there are situations where certain rats just don't take to each other enough to be permanent resident mates. In some situations this can be due to territorial males with a lot of testosterone, in which case neutering may be a good option. Neutering solves most of these tricky issues with males, however if it's with females then it might just be a bad fit. Remember that rats are like people and some people just don't get along. In these cases, it doesn't matter how badly you want them to be friends, for their own safety it's better to keep them apart. However, it is important to not give up too quickly. It can be a time-consuming process, especially with adult rats.