



Buttercup 348476: What to Expect

Buttercup is a graduate of the Behavior Modification Program and needs a special home. Buttercup is a sweet and sensitive boy who is ready to find his forever home. He may be timid at first, but once he feels safe, he loves being pet, eating yummy treats, soaking up sunshine sprawled out on his window perch, and playing with toys. Buttercup may never be a social butterfly with everyone he meets, but with patience and time to build trust, he will form a strong, loving bond with his person.

Buttercup came to OHS from the home of an overwhelmed cat caregiver, and we do not have much history on him. When Buttercup arrived at OHS he displayed fearful, shy behavior that would present itself as hissing, swatting and attempting to bite if we got too close to him. While housed at the main shelter, Buttercup was experiencing significant fear, anxiety, and stress. During a routine kennel cleaning, he darted out of his enclosure, and when a handler attempted to pick him up, he responded with a quick bite-and-release. The incident resulted in a minor tooth scrape, and no medical treatment was required. Given the circumstances, the behavior was considered a fear-based response to a highly stressful situation. Because of the high stress he was experiencing, the decision was made to place him in our Behavior Modification Program. The environment in the BMOD program is better suited at helping cats feel comfortable in a shelter environment. With the larger kennel space, access to windows, increased enrichment, and dedicated one-on-one time with our team, we were able to help him decompress and learn more about his personality.

Buttercup was very nervous during his first few weeks in BMOD and spent most of his time hiding on a high perch in his kennel, quietly watching us with wide, cautious eyes. Whenever other cats walked past his kennel, he would meow loudly, and it became clear that he was longing for feline companionship. Because of this, we decided to move him into our Sunroom, a communal cat space where he could interact with other kitties and feel more at ease. Almost immediately, his body language began to soften and relax. We often found him snuggling and playing with the other cats in the program. He especially enjoys the company of calm, confident kitties who help boost his confidence and show him the ropes on how to “cat”. As he watched us interacting gently with the other kitties, he slowly began to realize that we weren’t so scary after all.

Buttercup loves spending time on his favorite window perch, where he can sunbathe and watch the wildlife and world outside. We started speaking softly to him and offering him treats—Churus are his absolute favorite—and before long, he was happily eating them in our presence. He struggled with hands approaching to pet him and would back away with wide eyes, so we made the decision to introduce a Touch tool. A Touch tool is anything that can be considered an extension of your hand. In his case, we used a back scratcher. As we brought the scratcher close, he would lean forward to sniff it and allowed us to gently touch his chin and cheek area for a few seconds before backing away. We paired each “touch” interaction with treats and soon he was leaning into the touch from the back scratcher. He enjoyed the touch so much that he started accepting pets from our hands and now regularly looks forward to snuggle sessions with the staff. He loves having staff visit so much now that he perks up and gives a big stretch when he sees us and happily leans into pets while kneading biscuits, chirping, and purring.

Buttercup still has moments when he startles easily and may run and hide, but he recovers quickly with verbal encouragement. He has shown tremendous progress here, and we know that in the right home he will flourish even more. Buttercup will do best in a calm home, with a family that is patient with him as he acclimates. He will also need a kitty friend to snuggle and play with. If you are looking for the sweetest little green-eyed boy, Buttercup is the kitty for you!

His new family should expect that he will hide for a few weeks, possibly longer. You'll need to introduce him to new things slowly. Buttercup typically flees, hisses and swats when overwhelmed or scared. It's important to provide him with a small room with appropriate hiding spots for him to relax in, such as his own hidey bed. Hiding spots that are confined to a tight spot and out of reach from you will make it difficult to build a bond with him. The room you set him up in will be the catalyst for how quickly he acclimates. Start thinking now which room in your home would be best for Buttercup to settle into. If it's a bedroom, can he get under the bed or dresser making it difficult to spend time with him? If it's a laundry room or bathroom will the constant in and out of people and noises associated with these rooms be too much for him? By having a room without a lot of foot traffic and with appropriate hiding spots will allow you to work on building a relationship. While in his hiding spot, use calm voices and offer tasty treats to show you are not a threat. Place a small amount of wet food or a treat on a spoon and offer it to Buttercup while in his hidey spot. Over time, by continuing to do this, Buttercup will become more comfortable and recognize that yummy food = people, therefore creating a positive association between the two.

Here's how to help Buttercup during your first months together:

This step is crucial in helping Buttercup acclimate to his new home. Confine Buttercup to one cat-proof room in your house. Provide Buttercup with a litter box, food, water, and a bed. Ensure he cannot get to *inappropriate* hiding spots (under the bed, in a closet, on top of a cabinet, etc.). Provide him with a safe, comfortable hiding place instead like his cat carrier, a hidey-bed, or a large dog crate covered with a blanket.

Spend time with Buttercup in his room. Don't force him out of his hiding spot. Instead, encourage him to come out on his own using happy talk, offering a toy or treats. Once he is using the litter box, eating regularly, and coming out of hiding to interact with you, you can start introducing him to the rest of your home. Start by propping the door open and allowing him to come out on his own. Don't force it! If you come across something that you can tell Buttercup is worried about, allow him to hang back or hide if he chooses to do so.

Continue to provide a safe space. Even when Buttercup has started exploring the rest of the house, give him a safe space that he can retreat to. When he is in his safe space, insist that guests leave him alone and try to ignore him yourself. That way, when he comes out, you can reward his bravery with your attention.

No visitors (at first). Allow Buttercup time to adjust to your house, routine, and lifestyle before introducing him to new people. When you have visitors over, give Buttercup the freedom to make the decision to interact (or not!). Ask new people to ignore him – or if Buttercup seems curious or interested, have the new person toss him treats or offer a favorite toy. We want exciting, good things to come from new people.

Practice crate training. Leave his carrier out all the time, so it's just a part of his normal environment. Add a bed and keep the door securely propped open so he can go in and out on his own, making sure the door won't swing shut and frighten him. You can also clicker train him to run into the carrier on cue. Helping Buttercup get comfortable with his carrier will make it easier when it's time to visit the vet.

Visiting the vet: Unless it's an emergency, give Buttercup time to bond to you before taking him to the vet. Vet visits will more than likely be scary, but if he already trusts you, your presence may help him feel more comfortable.

Patience will come in handy for you. Buttercup is a cat that needs an understanding owner who has the time and desire to allow him to adapt in his own time. He may never be a social butterfly, and that's okay! Getting to know him and watching him come out of his shell will be extremely rewarding. Celebrate those small victories.

We're here to help!

We want Buttercup to be successful in his new home. We're available to answer questions via phone and email. Call the Behavior Helpline at (503)416-2983 or email the BMOD cat trainers at bmodcat@oregonhumane.org to connect with the Feline Behavior Modification department.

Please keep in touch so we can continue to help you and Buttercup now and in the future. Please reach out if you have any questions or concerns – or just to give an update. We love to see photos and hear how our friends are doing!

Thank you for adopting from the Oregon Humane Society. Congratulations on your new cat!