



Lady Willow 348042: What to Expect

Lady Willow is a graduate of our Behavior Modification Program and is looking for a special home. Lady Willow is a gorgeous, fluffy princess with a larger-than-life personality. Silly, playful, and delightfully opinionated, she enjoys being close to the people she trusts, but it will take some time for her to get to know you. Her new family should be prepared to give her plenty of patience, space, and understanding as she acclimates to her new environment. She is a sweet but independent girl who likes attention on her own terms. Lady Willow would do best in a calm, quiet household without young children or a lot of daily commotion. She is looking for a patient, cat-savvy adopter who understands feline body language and will allow her to adjust at her own pace. While she may be shy and cautious at first, once she feels safe and secure, her sweet, spirited, chatty, and endlessly entertaining personality truly shines.

Lady Willow came to OHS from an owner who could no longer care for her. Her previous home described her as an affectionate lap cat who loved playtime and happily followed her owner around, but she was often reserved and cautious when meeting new people. When Lady Willow arrived at OHS, her world had been turned upside down. Faced with an unfamiliar environment and sudden changes to her routine, she likely felt as though she had lost choice and control over her surroundings. Feeling overwhelmed and uncertain in the shelter environment, she displayed fearful and defensive behaviors, often sitting at the front of her kennel vocalizing and warning staff to give her space by swatting or attempting to bite when approached too closely. Due to her fearful and frustrated behavior, the decision was made to place her 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 her decompress and learn more about her personality.

After only a few days in BMOD, Lady Willow was displaying calm and relaxed behavior in her kennel. She could often be found lounging on her cat tower by the window, playing with her toys, enthusiastically scratching on her scratching post, or resting near the front of her kennel while quietly observing the people and space around her. Although her relaxed body language and proximity to the kennel door might have appeared to be an invitation for interaction, Lady Willow was still working to regain a sense of choice and control in her new environment. When staff opened her kennel door to engage with her or provide care for her, she would often vocalize and quickly swat, communicating that she was feeling uncertain and wanted more control over the interaction.

It was clear that Lady Willow was weary of us entering her space, so we encouraged her to come out of her kennel on her own into the larger cattery area. While she would readily come out to explore, she remained uneasy in the environment and continued to vocalize and swat when approached. We also introduced her to other cats in the program, and while she was able to coexist appropriately with them, these interactions appeared to increase her overall stress and reduce her sense of comfort and control. To support her comfort and success, we modified her enrichment plan so she could spend her out-of-kennel time exploring and playing on her own. This approach reduced her stress and supported her ability to build confidence gradually and on her own terms.

Once she had choice and control over her situation and without social pressure from us, she began to relax and show curiosity and interest in what we were doing. We focused on building a relationship with her by calmly sharing space while she was out of her kennel, using a soft voice and offering her tasty treats- Churus are her absolute favorite- and to

build a positive association with our presence. After several weeks of these interactions, she began to approach us for brief moments of gentle pets or to simply sit beside us with relaxed body language—always on her own terms. While she has become more comfortable with her surroundings and our company, she is still conflicted and uneasy in this environment. Lady Willow has been with us for a few months and, while she has made progress, she will need ongoing support in her new home. She remains uncomfortable with being touched and will benefit from a patient, dedicated adopter. We believe she will have the best opportunity to thrive in a home environment rather than a shelter setting. Her new family should expect that earning her trust and building a relationship will take time, patience, and consistency.

Lady Willow has become a staff and volunteer favorite, admired for her discerning personality and undeniable charm. She is a beautiful, dignified lady- and she knows it! When she's feeling more at ease, Lady Willow loves lounging in plush, luxurious beds, soaking up the sunshine from a cozy window perch while watching wildlife outside, and enthusiastically scratching away on her favorite scratching post. She can often be found darting through crinkly tunnels, pouncing after rolling ping pong balls, rolling around in catnip, getting into a little harmless mischief, and happily accepting delicious treats. Each morning, she is the first to greet us with her distinctive meow, brightening the day with her spirited and entertaining personality.

Willow lived with a dog in her previous home and was able to co-exist but she may prefer to be the only pet in her new home. She will need an experienced owner, someone that is familiar with working with shy/fearful cats and that has the time and patience to help her acclimate. If you are looking for a cuddly kitty that loves being pet, then Lady Willow is not the one for you. She will do best in a calm, quiet home with someone that is experienced in feline body language.

Her new family should be prepared for the possibility that she may hide for a few weeks, or even longer, as she adjusts to her new environment. During this time, it's important to introduce her to new experiences slowly and at her own pace. Lady Willow may hiss, swat, or retreat when she feels overwhelmed or scared, so creating a safe, calm space for her is essential. Set her up in a small, quiet room where she can relax and feel secure, with appropriate hiding spots such as a covered bed or enclosed hideaway. At the same time, avoid hiding places that are completely inaccessible, like tight spaces under heavy furniture, as these can make it difficult to build trust and bond with her. The setup of her initial room will play a major role in how quickly she begins to acclimate. Consider carefully which room in your home would be best. If it's a bedroom, think about whether she could get under the bed or dresser in a way that limits interaction. If it's a bathroom or laundry room, consider whether frequent noise and traffic might be overwhelming for her. Choose a space that is quiet, low-traffic, and allows you to interact with her in a gentle, consistent way. This will help her feel safe while still giving you opportunities to build trust. While she is in her hiding spot, use a calm voice and offer positive reinforcement through treats. You can place a small amount of wet food or a treat on a spoon and offer it near her safe space. Over time, repeated gentle interactions like this can help her learn that people are associated with positive experiences, such as food and safety, which will gradually build her confidence and trust.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We're here to help!

We want Lady Willow to be successful in her new home. We are 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 support you and Lady Willow 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!