



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. She is an independent girl who likes attention on her own terms. She can be conflicted with her feelings, one minute rubbing on you for attention and the next swatting and nipping. Playful and opinionated, she will need plenty of time to build trust with her new family. Her new family should be prepared to give her plenty of patience, space, and understanding as she acclimates to her new environment. She is looking for a patient, cat-savvy adopter who understands feline body language and will allow her to adjust at her own pace.

Lady Willow was adopted from the BMOD program for about a week but returned due to the behaviors described below. Though she is a strikingly beautiful girl, she is not your average Ragdoll and will need an experienced owner, someone that is familiar working with conflicted and overstimulated cats. If you are looking for a cuddly kitty that loves being pet, then Lady Willow is not the one for you.

Lady Willow came to OHS from an owner who could no longer care for her. Her previous home described her as a 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. Feeling overwhelmed and uncertain in the shelter environment, she displayed 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 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 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 space and control over the interaction.

It became clear that Lady Willow was uncomfortable with us entering her personal space, so we shifted our approach and allowed her to leave her kennel on her own to explore the larger cattery. Although she readily came out to investigate her surroundings, she remained uneasy in the environment. She frequently vocalized and would swat if someone approached too closely. To help her feel more secure, we gave her plenty of space and made a point of passing by slowly and at a comfortable distance.

We focused on building a relationship with Lady Willow by calmly sharing her space, speaking to her in a soft, reassuring voice, and offering her favorite treats—Churu’s are by far her favorite—to help create positive associations with our presence. We also incorporated activities she genuinely enjoyed, especially playtime. She loves pouncing on wand toys, racing through tunnels, and batting ping pong balls across the floor.

After several weeks of these consistent, positive interactions, Lady Willow’s swatting and nipping became less frequent but did not fully stop. On a few occasions, she began to approach staff and rub on their legs. However, she was quick to swat if anyone tried to pet her. She made her boundaries very clear: while she started to enjoy our company, looked forward to treats, and eagerly participated in daily play sessions, choosing to come close or rub against us was not an invitation to be touched.

Lady Willow has been with us for several months and, while she has made meaningful progress, she will continue to need support as she adjusts to a new home. She is still sensitive to touch and can become uncomfortable with fast movements, such as people walking quickly past her. She will do best with a patient, dedicated adopter who understands that building trust happens gradually. We believe Lady Willow has the greatest opportunity to thrive in a home environment, where she can settle in at her own pace and develop a routine, rather than in the busy shelter setting. Her new family should expect that earning her trust and forming a strong bond will take time, patience, consistency, and a willingness to respect her boundaries.

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 will vocalize, swat, or nip when she feels overwhelmed or scared, especially if you get too close to her liking, 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. When she decides to approach, allow her to investigate you at her own pace without reaching out to touch her. Avoid forcing any interaction or handling, as she will respond with a swat or nip if she feels uncomfortable. Even if she rubs against your legs, think of it as her way of saying hello—not necessarily an invitation to pet her. Instead, offer gentle verbal praise to reinforce her confidence while continuing to respect her boundaries. 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!