

HOUSEBREAKING YOUR DOG

Helen Cariotis NADOI # 372

Housebreaking your new puppy or adult dog should be a fairly straightforward task. The nice things to remember about housebreaking are that once accomplished, it is forever, and thank goodness our dogs are genetically “set up” to be housebroken. That makes our task so much easier. Canines are “den animals,” which means they have an instinct **not** to soil their sleeping areas. Mother dogs are very good at keeping their whelping boxes and puppies clean, so from the start puppies are used to living in a clean environment. As long as we humans don't short-circuit that desire by the way we maintain them, housebreaking should be easy.

Start when you first bring your puppy or dog home. Unless you have a tiny toy, I encourage you to teach your puppy to eliminate outside from the beginning. Some owners of toys have successfully used paper, specially scented pads, or litter boxes indoors for their dogs. Toys “can” learn to go outside, and for most of us this will be a better arrangement over the long term. Feed the best food you can provide, following your veterinarian and breeder's advice. Remember that all training, including housebreaking, will go so much faster if someone is home to do the teaching, and puppies in particular will need to go outside many times throughout the day. It is not fair to expect any dog and absolutely not a puppy to “hold it” while you leave the house for 8-10 hours!

Although modifications can be made for the age of the puppy or dog, your schedule, and your particular home environment, here is the general protocol for housebreaking:

- Feed and water the puppy on a schedule. Puppies and dogs that “nibble” all day will likely need to go out to eliminate at unpredictable times. If you are there and watching them *all* the time, you can meet their needs, but if not, it will be a guessing game. We know that puppies and dogs typically will eliminate quite soon after eating, so it is to your advantage to know that and take them outside. Young puppies will need to be fed more often than older puppies and adults, probably 4 times a day initially. Allow the puppy to eat, then take up the bowl. If food is left after 10 minutes, you may be feeding too much food. *Follow your veterinarian or breeder's advice if you have a very young toy breed puppy, as they sometimes will have special feeding needs.* Treats offered between meals should be very sparing, as this is, after all, eating, and may interfere with your housebreaking protocol. Offer water at each meal, and several other times during the day, but take it up after the puppy drinks. Water may be left available the entire time outdoors, as anytime the puppy drinks outside and then eliminates, that is what we want! Also, during warm weather water should always be available for your dog outside. Remember, EATING + DRINKING = ELIMINATION.
- Feed the best food you can. Raw is always good, but an excellent kibble is a good choice as well. Avoid corn, wheat, and soy if you can, meat by-products, and additives like sugars, dyes and preservatives. Cheap foods may cause

housebreaking problems, stool-eating, allergies, and many other health problems down the road. Consult your veterinarian or breeder for advice.

- Take your puppy out frequently to eliminate. A general rule to remember is: after eating and drinking, first thing in the morning, last thing before bed, after a nap, after playing, or after any change in activity. For young puppies, this will mean you are taking them out hourly in some cases. You may find that putting newspapers down in your kitchen where you are confining the puppy will be a huge aid. The puppy will learn to go to his papers, and as he grows and can “hold it” for longer periods, you can safely remove them. Do not worry that this will teach your puppy to “go” in the house. Using papers this way is strictly short-term and all papers should be gone by 12-14 weeks in most breeds. When you take the puppy outside to “go,” use a command word so that he knows what you want him to do. I like “go potty,” but you can say whatever you want as long as you are consistent (and remember that all family members should say the same word). Praise the puppy verbally if he eliminates, and allow him to stay outside and play for a while (unless the middle of the night). If he learns that you are going to whisk him back inside (and possibly confine him) the instant he “goes,” he will quickly learn to stall on that task.
- Indoors, your puppy should be confined or under your direct visual supervision at all times. You may use a dog crate, confine the puppy behind baby gates in your kitchen or similar small room, or use a “puppy playpen or x-pen. You may carry the puppy, or have the puppy on a leash or lightweight line that you hold or allow to drag. This makes you responsible for what your puppy is doing! There is simply no way your puppy will eliminate indoors if you are watching him. Do not be tempted to leave him alone in the living room while you answer the phone or get on the computer; take him with you on the leash, or confine him. No exceptions!
- Outdoors, your puppy should be allowed plenty of time to run and play. He needs the space and secure footing to develop a healthy body and grow properly, and also will benefit from the mental stimulation of watching the birds, carrying sticks, and getting lots of fresh air. Make sure your outdoor area is very secure and puppy-proof. Puppies can slip through small openings, and will chew and dig. Also, they tend to eat many “non-edibles,” some of which will not be good for them. Usually, it is not a good thing to go off and leave a small puppy unattended outdoors, as they can get themselves into trouble or even be stolen.
- Overnight the puppy should sleep in a crate by your bed. Young puppies will need to go out several times at night in the beginning, and this will allow you to hear the puppy whine to let you know. Most puppies are sleeping through the night by 12 weeks, although this is quite variable, so be prepared to be flexible. Keeping the crate by your bed has the added advantage of providing the puppy with the security he needs from his new “pack.” Dogs are highly social, and forcing your puppy to sleep isolated from you will many times cause unintended

problems. Having him near you overnight is a quick and easy way to begin forging that lifetime relationship of love, loyalty, and eagerness to please!

- Your puppy can also be kept in his crate during the day for short periods, but please do not abuse use of the crate! If you must go off an leave a young puppy for hours during the day, consider alternatives such as coming home for lunch, having someone come in to give the puppy a break (a neighbor or pet-sitter), a secure outdoor living arrangement, or even dog day care.
- If you are with your dog inside and see him sniffing or beginning to eliminate, verbally correct him and get him outside quickly, where you can praise him for going. If you find an accident “after the fact,” you can’t really scold him then, as he won’t remember it. This is your fault for not confining, exercising, or watching your puppy! You may want to purchase an enzyme type odor eliminator like OutRight or Nature’s Miracle to use on any indoor spots. These products are very good because they completely remove any urine/feces odor.

Good luck and remember, housebreaking is simple if you will resolve to be there when your puppy needs to you be, schedule food and water, take out frequently, and confine when you aren’t there or can’t watch!

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