

Housebreaking a Puppy

Frequently, a puppy becomes a member of a family that is unaccustomed to the behavior of a canine youngster. A pup might be the first pet in a home, the companion for a geriatric dog, or a replacement to fill the spot vacated by a deceased pet. The introduction of a puppy into a home can create chaos or, with proper training of the animal, result in a loving human-animal bond.

Of all a puppy's lessons, acquisition of acceptable toilet habits is a priority. The number one rule to remember during a dog's adolescence is that accidents will happen despite the most conscientious efforts of the owner. These incidents are not purposeful attempts by the pet to get even with the owner. Instead, they represent a skill not mastered or, often, unreasonable expectations from the owner. Areas such as carpeting must, from the beginning, be delineated as off limits.

Patience and consistency are essential. It is a common mistake to take the puppy out for a few minutes, returning to the house just when the puppy is ready to defecate. This happens most often during inclement weather when neither the owner nor puppy wants to stay outside. Make sure the puppy has completed urinating and defecating before it comes back in.

Housetraining should begin when the puppy is between 8 and 16 weeks old and capable of learning short lessons. At this time, the young dog also learns to use a canine group elimination area. Simplified house-training involves adherence to a schedule, a confined bedding area, and lavish amounts of verbal reward.

Schedule

There are four times a puppy typically eliminates:

1. A puppy usually eliminates soon after it wakes. For example, a pup will urinate after a nap. It is important to remember that puppies sleep several times a day, and thus have several waking periods.
2. After eating, the gastro colic response produces a bowel movement. With three to four feedings each day, young puppies require a considerable number of trips outside.
3. Intense activity by the dog stimulates elimination.
4. Dogs normally eliminate before bedding-down at night.

Strict schedules and a regular routine of resting, eating, and playing regulate the elimination process. When family members pursue random activities, the puppy's schedule, including the need to eliminate, varies also. In households where the puppy is left alone for 8 to 20 hours at a time, the pet tends to sleep most of the day. Occasionally accidents will happen because, at this age, the puppy's bladder simply does not have the required capacity.

Confined Area

When alone, the young dog should be confined in a small area like a bathroom, utility room or a plywood 8' x 8' crate. A space this size is large enough for water bowl and clearly defined bedding area, yet limits the amount of space in which accidents can happen. Dogs prefer not to soil their bed area. They tend to retain urine and feces until they have access to an acceptable location for elimination.

Puppies can be confined to very small areas, such as crates, when owners are only gone for a few hours at a time. If confined for long periods, the dog can learn to disregard cleanliness standards of the bed area if they are not allowed to go outside at appropriate times. On the other had, puppies given the run of the house have a hard time associating the entire area as off limits.

Dogs learn to prefer one surface for elimination, to the exclusion of all others. Newspaper, grass, concrete, or asphalt commonly becomes the chosen surface, at the prompting of the owner. When dogs raised outside are allowed into the house, shag carpeting often serves as the surface most closely resembling grass.

Verbal Reward

Praise is a strong motivator to reinforce the learning process in a dog. The effective memory span for a puppy is no longer than 30 seconds, so praise is best given when the dog is actually eliminating. This means going out with the puppy during this learning process. The word no serves as a sufficient negative response to accidents and should be followed by praise when the puppy completes either elimination process in the designated area.

Conclusion

Despite tenacious efforts by the owner, certain dogs do not seem to learn housetraining. Some breeds have been bred selectively to retain juvenile characteristic, primarily their small size (less than 10 lbs). These dogs often retain juvenile behavior patterns as well. This includes an inability to learn toilet training.

Housebreaking becomes a simple procedure when the owner is properly informed about the importance of maintaining a schedule, confining the puppy properly, and praising the animal for appropriate behavior.