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Housebreaking Your Puppy

PET JOURNAL

The kids want a dog, but you don't want to tackle the training? Take heart--once you realize how eager the pup is to please you, the job will be a breeze. (Well, almost!)

By Roger Caras

HOUSEBREAKING YOUR PUPPY

No single problem can loom larger for the new dog owner than housebreaking. But it needn't be an obstacle to a clean and orderly home.

What is the first thing to remember? Your dog wants to please you. Once you show your pet what you expect and give her a chance to live up to your expectations, your task will probably be completed.

Is one sex easier to train than the other? Very often, but not inevitably, females are a little easier to train. Male dogs urinate not only to dispose of body wastes but to advise other dogs, frequently and routinely, of territorial boundaries. This might be rough on your house, at least until the dog is trained. Females don't engage in this behavior. And because a female "goes" less often, she is more readily taught to use one place. This is a permanent advantage. Also keep in mind: If you have valued shrubs, a female won't hoist a leg and soil them.

Are some breeds easier to train? Undeniably, yes. Large dogs seem a little easier than small ones. And working dogs and the sporting dogs are so eager to please that they're likely to be easiest of all. But success depends most of all on your relationship with your pet.

Should you paper train a puppy first, then graduate to the outside? Only when there's no other option. Paper training before outside training means, really, that you must housebreak your dog twice. That is more work for you, and confusing for your dog. Sometimes you have no choice. If you live in a large city, your veterinarian may advise that you not take a very young puppy outside for weeks or even months. This is to protect the youngster from diseases other dogs may have left behind. You might also have to paper train a puppy that is too small to tolerate cold weather.

Is it wise to put a puppy's nose in the mess he's made? There really is nothing sillier than jamming a confused and frightened puppy's nose into something his nose didn't create!

What about using a rolled up newspaper for punishment? Useless! Physical punishment only makes a dog tense, and thus more likely to have an accident.

What is the training procedure, then? Begin as soon as your dog seems old enough. This point varies from breed to breed and even from dog to dog, but you usually can start training any time after the puppy is ten to twelve weeks old. The idea is to create a routine that

enables your puppy to please you while he's learning acceptable behavior. Follow these steps:

1. Don't provide unlimited water for a dog that is not completely housetrained. Water, like food, must be provided at controlled times. Don't give any food or drink within a couple of hours of bedtime.
2. Immediately after every meal or drink, take the puppy outside for a walk. Walk him several other times a day as well, and always just before bed.
3. Praise your pup lavishly whenever she relieves herself in an approved area.
4. Clean up accidents immediately and apply one of the deodorants available at any pet shop so the animal doesn't return to the site and use it again. If you don't catch the puppy in the act of relieving herself in an unapproved area, it is almost always too late to turn the event into a lesson. After a delay of even a few minutes, the pup has usually forgotten her association with the mess. If your pet does seem to make the association herself and appears guilty, low-level admonition is all you should attempt: "What did you do? You bad, bad dog!" That's all. No noses, no newspapers, no hysteria.
5. When you're going to be away, confine your dog to a small area. He'll sleep in your absence anyway, so all he needs is a comfortable

ble place to lie down in and room to stand up and change position. Generally, dogs won't mess their bedding.

6. When you are home, always keep your pet in view. An unsupervised puppy is more likely to have an accident. If he has been sleeping, get him outside the moment he begins to stir. And any time he appears restless or suddenly loses interest in a toy, out he goes.

How long should all of this take?

There are, of course, many variables. But if your puppy is four months old, or older, you should be able to housebreak him in from four days to two weeks. There may be occasional accidents, but they will get less and less frequent.

With your help and gentle guidance, a puppy will soon learn proper behavior. When indoors, be sure to keep him in sight. The moment he seems restless, wakes from a nap or finishes a drink or meal, out he goes.