

Housetraining and Crate Training

Basic Canine Education



CARE SHEET

Developed with and approved by a Qualified Veterinarian

Housetraining a new dog or puppy can seem a daunting task to the new owner. But understanding your options and the reasons behind the training can go a long way toward insuring a positive outcome.

Housetraining Options

- Paper** Your puppy or dog learns to eliminate on papers or puppy pads.
Advantages: Portable, indoors, doesn't require going outside on very cold or very hot days.
Disadvantages: Dog may view any papers lying on the floor as fair game; if you plan on training your dog to go outside eventually, this adds another step to the training process.
- Litter Box** Your puppy or dog learns to use a size-appropriate litter box.
Advantages: Portable, indoors, doesn't require going outside on very cold or very hot days; dog doesn't have to wait for someone to let her outside.
Disadvantages: Daily cleaning of litter box; may not work well for larger dogs or some male dogs
- Crate Training** Your puppy or dog learns to eliminate outside, using a crate to confine him when not being actively supervised.
Advantages: No intermediary steps; uses dog's natural instincts to control bathroom habits; gives the dog a safe and secure place to call his own.
Disadvantages: must go outside regardless of weather or time of day or night; dog must wait until owner can take him outside.

Background Information

Dogs are den animals. In the wild, instinct encourages them to keep their dens clean by eliminating somewhere outside of their sleeping place. Because both urine and feces have strong scents, this scent in or around the den could scare away prey or attract predators. It is this instinct that allows for housetraining.

Keeping your dog or puppy on a consistent schedule for eating, drinking and potty breaks will go a long way toward establishing good bathroom habits. Puppies should be given the chance to eliminate within 15 minutes of eating, drinking, waking, or hard play sessions.

Some experts believe that puppies may not be developed enough physically to completely control their bladder and bowels until they are at least 4 months of age. Housetraining can and should begin before that, but don't expect total control until sometime after 4 months.

Some breeds, especially certain toy breeds, are more difficult to housetrain than others. Patience and persistence are always important. Seemingly stubborn cases may actually be the result of a medical condition. Always speak with your veterinarian if you are having difficulty housetraining your dog, or if a normally trustworthy dog starts having accidents.

If an area smells like a bathroom to a dog, it **is** a bathroom. Always clean housetraining mistakes with an enzymatic cleaner to reduce the chance of repeats.

Paper Training

Choose a confined location such as a bathroom or utility room. Cover the floor completely with papers or puppy pads. Place the puppy's bed in one corner of the room. Instinct will probably cause the puppy to go to the bathroom in a spot as far away from her bed as possible.

Once the puppy is eliminating consistently in the same general area, slowly begin removing the papers or pads closest to his bed. Change the remaining papers frequently, but place a small piece of the soiled paper on top of the clean paper in the area you want him to eliminate. Continue until you have removed all but one or two sheets. If he eliminates on bare floor at any time, clean the area with an enzymatic cleaner, and recover the area in papers.

Once he is consistently using one or two papers, you can begin to slowly widen the area the puppy is confined in. Reduce the area if accidents occur.

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Crate Training While many people cringe at the thought of placing their new dog or puppy in a “cage”, crate training is, in fact, a natural and relatively comfortable experience for the dog. As a rule, dogs, being den animals, feel safe and secure in small, confined areas. A crate is simply an artificial den. It makes housetraining much easier, and protects the dog and your home when you are not able to closely supervise your new companion.

Selecting a Crate

Your dog should be able to stand up, turn around, and lie down in her crate. For puppies, it is important that the crate not be big enough to allow the puppy to eliminate in one corner and sleep in another. If you wish to buy a crate that will fit your puppy when it is full grown, simply block off the back of it with a large box, so that you restrict the total floor space available to the puppy.

Wire crates often fold for storage, but may be heavy. Also, wire crates do not afford the same security for the dog as plastic kennels, since, to the dog, the crate is open on all sides, and provides no protection from attack.

Plastic kennels are more secure for the dog, warmer inside, and many are airline approved. Although lightweight, they are bulky to store.

Training

Although instincts encourage him to seek out a den, your dog may not immediately fall in love with his new kennel. Introduce it gradually, throwing a treat into the crate and allowing him to go in, eat it, and come right back out. Praise him each time he enters his crate. Feed him in his crate. Don't close the door until he seems very comfortable. Then, open it immediately. Gradually increase the length of time the door is closed.

Once the dog is used to the crate, allow him to spend longer periods in it while you stay nearby. Never open the door of the crate while your dog is whining, barking, scratching, or doing anything you don't want to encourage. Do not praise your dog when you let him out.

Never use the crate for punishment, or drag your dog over to it. Never allow children to tease a crated dog, bang on the crate, or enter the crate with the dog. This is your dog's private space. Teach children to respect it as such.

With your dog safely kenneled, you can begin serious housetraining. Anytime you cannot actively supervise your pet, place him in the crate with a Kong stuffed with treats or some other fun toy. Each time you take him out of the kennel, take him straight outdoors or to the litter box, whichever location you have chosen. Do not play with him until he has gone potty. Praise him profusely, then play.

Anytime you see him sniffing and circling, chances are good that he needs to go to his bathroom spot. If you catch him in the act of squatting in an inappropriate location, give a loud, sharp “NO!” and pick him up, sliding his tail between his back legs. This will often stop the elimination long enough for you to get him to the proper spot. Then praise, praise, praise when he finishes there.

Punishing the dog after the fact will NOT help housebreak him. It will teach him to fear you, and see you as unpredictable. Remember the 3-second rule: praise or punishment will be connected with whatever the dog or puppy was doing 3 seconds before it occurred. Rubbing his nose in accidents will only teach him to leave the scene as quickly as possible.

Litter Boxes Training your dog to use a litter box is much easier if you combine it with crate training. Keep the box clean, but leave a small amount of soiled litter to encourage the dog to return to the box. Make sure the box is large enough for the dog to circle in.

Note: The information on this Care Sheet is not a substitute for veterinary care. If you need additional information, please refer to the above sources or contact your veterinarian as appropriate.