

House Training

The housetraining stage can be the most frustrating part of puppy training. Due to the fact that so many people give up on their puppy at this stage, it is so important to take the correct steps in crate training to avoid either giving the puppy away or behavior problems later on as the puppy grows older. When house training a puppy, I highly recommend crate training as it is the most effective way to help your puppy gain bladder and bowel control. Dogs naturally will not soil in the confinement of their bedding area so having the puppy stay in his crate for short term rest periods can teach him to hold his bladder and bowels until such time you can take him out to the appropriate area where you would like him to eliminate. In addition to housetraining, crate training can provide a safe, secure and private area, travel safety, and also discourages destructive behavior. By taking the necessary measures to introducing your puppy to a crate, house training should be a positive and successful experience for both owner and puppy.

The first step in crate training would be to buy an appropriately sized crate. Depending on your preference you can purchase a hard plastic Vari-Kennel type crate that, mimics a den or a wire crate that is more open, which could be made "den like" by placing a blanket over it. Which ever you choose, your puppy must be able to stand up, turn around, and lie down comfortably with no extra space to possibly relieve himself in his crate. Buy a big enough crate that will allow room for the puppy to grow. The wire crates will sometimes come with dividers that you can adjust as needed. If you choose a plastic crate then you can use boxes or another items to fill up the unused space. Once you have brought your crate home and set it up, it is advisable to place your crate in one spot and use the same exit door to avoid confusion. Some pet owners prefer to purchase two crates, one to keep in the main living area and one to keep in their bedroom. Keeping a crate in the bedroom helps by allowing the owner to be near by to hear the puppy whine or move about when they want to go outside as a young puppy will be up several times during the night as their bladder and bowels have not yet matured. This will also help with separation anxiety and saves on moving the crate every night before bed.

There are many factors that effect housetraining and some puppies find it harder to learn than others. Prior to brining your puppy home you should have already set up his crate and have considered what you are going to feed him. Diet can have an impact on housetraining. Puppies need a high calorie, high quality food to establish good health. A high quality food will have less fillers and keep your puppy satisfied longer. Providing a high quality food will also result in less bowel movements making training that much easier.

Now it is time to introduce your puppy to his new crate. It is very important to make the introduction a very positive experience. Simply let the puppy go in and out of the crate of his own accord and let him explore. It is not recommend to force, or push the puppy into the crate as the puppy may see this as a negative experience. You can encourage your puppy to enter the crate by placing blankets,

toys and treats and letting him find what is in there. Some times playing a game of “hide and seek” with a toy or treat can make it even more appealing for the puppy, as he sees, he can also have fun while in his crate. Feeding your puppy in his crate is another way to make the crate more appealing.

Once your puppy is happy and comfortable going in and out of his crate you can start leaving him in there for short periods of time with the door shut after he has eliminated and is ready for some quiet time. There is no doubt that your puppy will cry and whine once the door is shut. It is crucial that you do not let the puppy out or he will quickly learn that if he whines and cries you will take him out. However, if your puppy does not settle after 15 minutes return him outside to his spot if you think the pup has to go. If you are sure the puppy definitely doesn't have to go outside again, then wait him out.

A crate should never be used to “get the puppy out of the way” or used for long extended periods of time. It is best to slowly build duration of your puppy's stay in his crate. Start by having your puppy stay in his crate for an hour or less. Very young puppies will have to eliminate every hour or so. When you are ready to let your puppy come out, take him immediately to the spot where you would like him to empty his bladder and bowels. Make sure that you walk the puppy to his spot and not carry him so that the smells in his outside area will prompt him to go there every time. Allow the puppy ten to fifteen minutes to find his spot and relieve himself. Give lots of praise once the puppy has finished eliminating. You don't want to praise too soon as it may cause the puppy to stop because it has been distracted and might be looking for a treat. This could lead to the pup having an accident when he goes back inside because he really wasn't finished. Puppies will sometimes go more than once in an outing so enough time should be allowed for a puppy to complete the task at hand. Once your puppy has completely eliminated and you can reward your puppy to let him know he has done well.

After your puppy, has stayed happily in his crate, has gone outside to relieve himself, and has been very well rewarded for doing so, take some time to play with the puppy. Playing can help with bonding, mental and physical stimulation, so it is just as important to exercise and interact with your puppy as it is to teach to him to spend time quietly in his crate. After you have exercised your puppy and have rid him of some of that excess puppy energy, you should return him to his crate for some quiet time. You can now start the process all over again of listening to your puppy, taking him out to where you want him to eliminate, praise and reward, play and return to his crate.

The keys to successful housetraining are consistency, patience, and routine. Starting your puppy on a daily routine will help the housetraining progress quickly. Puppies most likely need to eliminate after meal times, play times, or immediately upon waking up. Escorting your puppy outside to his spot after these scheduled times should create some good results. Be as boring as you can be and make sure that his bathroom outings just that and not play time. This will help

your puppy to learn business first and play after. Otherwise the puppy will think that every time he comes out of his crate that it's playtime, which in the middle of the night could be a problem for you and can lead to accidents in the house. As your puppy gets older, you can slowly increase the amount of time that he spends in his crate. If the puppy should mess in his crate, do not punish the puppy but shorten the amount of time that he spends in there and continue taking the puppy out at scheduled times to build duration. If a puppy continues to mess in his crate despite your best efforts, it could be an anxiety or health problem such as a separation anxiety, bladder infection, or worms.

As your puppy grows, so will his bladder and bowel control. It should take approximately 4-6 weeks to housetrain your puppy. By the age of 3-4 months your puppy should be fairly good at housetraining but may not be one hundred percent reliable. By about 6 months of age your now, almost grown up puppy should be reliable. Do not be surprised if your puppy has the occasional accident even after you think the puppy is fully housetrained especially as the pup gets older. At this stage sometimes accidents will happen as owners become more relaxed and assume the pup can hold his bladder or bowels for "one more minute" and will soon tire of taking the puppy out on a regular basis. Punishing the puppy is of no use especially after the fact, as the puppy will not associate what it has done wrong with the punishment. Yelling and rubbing the puppy's nose in the mess will only create fear and head shyness. If you see your puppy eliminating somewhere, where he shouldn't be then simply give a firm NO!, and escort the puppy to his appropriate place and give him lots of praise for finishing his business in his spot. When out of his crate, you can watch for signs that your puppy needs to go outside. He will sniff on the ground in move in a circular motion looking for what he thinks is that perfect spot to go. Avoid cleaning up any mess while your puppy is present. The body language you give off could have a negative affect on your puppy. It is best to clean up an accident with an enzyme based product which will eliminate all smells that your puppy my have left behind. Eliminating such odors will help in keeping the puppy soiling in the same spot.

In time, your puppy will be reliable enough to leave the crate door open and let him explore his surroundings with no accidents. Crate training can also lead to other types of "tricks" your puppy will be able to do. Some people will teach their puppy to ring a bell at the door when they want out, use a command word like, "go outside?" or even go to their crate on command. Throughout housetraining if you cannot supervise your puppy keep him confined or crated. In the end, if you have followed the steps correctly and have made it one of the most positive experiences in your puppy's life, you have just set up your puppy for success and not failure.

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Resources

- Puppy School, Gwen Baily ISBN 0-600-61081-0
- Puppy Parenting Jan Greye and Gail Smith ISBN 0-06-039315-7
- Preventing Puppy Problems Dee Woodcock ISBN 0-9541636-1-3
- <http://www.perfectpaws.com/crt.html>
- <http://www.cratetraining.net/secured/CrateTraining.pdf>
- After You Get Your Puppy- Dr. Ian Dunbar- ISBN: 1-888047-01-1