

The Art of Housebreaking a Puppy

Having just returned from the home of a client who owns a 4 month old Yorkshire Terrier who had made their home his toilet and knowing that this is a difficult proposition for many new dog owners I decided to make it a priority to create this article on how to correctly train your dog to eliminate outside of the house every time.

As with anything worthwhile this process isn't easy. It is not that the work involved is laborious or stressful but it is going to require change from your daily routine at least until such time that the puppy understands where he is supposed to go to relieve himself.

First, to produce a dog that will eventually become completely housebroken you will need the aid of a crate. Crates serve to restrict the dog to an area where he eats and sleeps. If your puppy was raised by a good mother your pup learned very early on that he should not urinate or defecate in the area where he eats, sleeps or plays.

Crates come in two different forms. One is the plastic, molded crate. This crate has a solid top and creates a more enclosed feeling for the pup. The second type is referred to as a wire crate. They do not have an enclosed top however to create a greater sense of enclosure you can simply drape a blanket over the top and down the sides if you choose to do so. Wire crates also come with a panel that you can place inside the crate to make the inside area bigger as the dog grows. Therefore, you will not have to purchase a new crate as the puppy grows.

In order for crating to create success it must be the right size. A crate in which your pup or dog can stand with his head comfortably elevated while allowing him to turn around in it is what is needed. If you provide a crate with much more room than this the pup will go to one corner to eliminate and then move to the other corner of the cage to sleep or rest. Do not feel like you are cramming the dog. Just as their ancestors the gray wolf sought a den as an area of security, properly introduced your puppy's new crate will become his safe haven and a place he will soon retreat to for peace and quiet.

Training your dog to accept the crate is an easy process. Begin by taking him over to the crate with the door open. Toss one of his favorite treats inside and close the door for one second. Then immediately let him out and praise him. Continue this exercise throughout the day while beginning to increase the amount of time that you allow him to spend in the crate.

After practicing this technique for a while, try another method. Get yourself a Kong toy and stuff it with cheese or something else that your dog will love. You can freeze the contents so that it will take some time for your dog to work on getting it out. Take the dog to the crate and show him the Kong. Let him sniff it and get excited. Toss the Kong in the crate and close the door as you walk away. Allow the dog to enjoy the treat for a number of minutes. Do not allow him to finish the stuffing. We want to go back to the crate and release the puppy from the crate before he is finished snacking. This way he

will think “hey why did you do that? I was having fun in there!” This is exactly the feeling we want to evoke. In addition to these methods, allow your dog to eat his meals inside the crate. You can keep the door open if you remain in the room while he is eating. If you need to walk away from the crate while he is eating you must shut the door in order to prevent the dog from coming out and running off to another part of the house to relieve himself.

Utilizing a crate is the first step to quick success in house training. Placement of the crate should be in front of or very close to the door that the dog will be utilizing to go out when he relieves himself. Do not place the crate in an area where the dog has to make turns in and out of rooms to get to the door that he exits the house from. This will only increase the chance that an accident will occur. This is the very thing we are trying to prevent.

In addition to acclimating the pup to his new crate we must also provide him with a rigid schedule of daily walks. Dogs love routine and in order to minimize accidents in the house you will have to develop one.

Obviously the pup can only hold his bladder for a limited amount of time. A general rule of thumb for bladder control is the pup’s age in months multiplied by two. Therefore a two month old pup should be able to hold his bladder (under the right conditions) for four hours. This should be considered when developing the walking schedule.

A typical schedule would look something like this. Take the pup outside before retiring for the evening. If you go to bed at 10PM, it might be a good idea to eliminate the pup’s access to water about an hour earlier. Take the puppy out before going to bed. At about 2AM you may start hearing some whining therefore he should be taken out again. At 6AM the pup should be ready to go outside again.

If you choose to feed him at this time, place him in his crate and remain with him until he has finished his food. Wait a few minutes and then take him immediately outside again. Be sure to let the pup spend at least five minutes outside and do not rush in right after he urinates. Many puppies will not completely empty their bladder on the first try. Bringing the pup back inside too soon is a chief reason for accidents.

You should have a word that you use when you want the pup to eliminate such as break, business, go potty. Whatever you choose be consistent in applying it when you bring the pup to his soiling area. As he begins to sniff say the word you’ve chosen. When he starts to do his business, praise him softly and when he finishes give him a treat reward.

Anytime the pup has been playing or become a little excited he will need to go outside immediately. While the pup is playing begin to look for the tell tale signs of a pup that might need to eliminate, head down, sniffing around, leaving the play area to wander off. If you’re not sure, better safe than sorry, take the puppy out. Throughout the day the puppy should remain in his crate during those times that you can not give him one hundred percent of your undivided attention. Puppies that are not

watched very closely end up wandering off into another room and eliminating. They will not eliminate where the activity takes place.

At a minimum your 8 week old puppy must be given the opportunity to go outside every four hours. Therefore, if you leave for work at 7AM and do not return home until 5PM it is almost impossible for the pup to hold his bladder. Therefore, find a neighbor or dog walker that can assist you during these early months.

The amount of time that it takes to completely housebreak a pup is very much dependent on how many times he makes a mistake and eliminates in the house. The more times he eliminates in the house without repercussion the harder it is going to be to break him of the habit. You must maximize the number of times he eliminates outside and minimize as much as possible his ability to have an accident. If you can do this the pup will be housebroken in no time at all.

We never punish a dog for eliminating in the house, especially if we find the mess after the fact. Dogs do not make a connection between the applications of punishment relative to a forbidden behavior unless the correction occurs within one to three seconds of the act. Should you catch the pup in the act, clap your hands or make another loud noise that will startle him. Then say to him “outside” and take him immediately outside to the area where he eliminates. When he does his business praise him and provide a treat reward. It is also necessary that the treat be given immediately after the pup has relieved himself. If you wait to deliver the treat once you are back in the house the pup is not going to make the connection with receiving the reward for something he did twenty to thirty seconds ago. Remember, dogs live in the moment. As with punishment, positive reinforcement must be given immediately after the act we want to promote.

Be sure that you do not fall into the lazy habit of just letting your dog run outside to do his business. One of the goals in housebreaking is to get the pup to understand that he is to go to the same spot over and over again. You cannot control this unless you have the pup on a leash.

Utilizing the method described above in a consistent manner will produce a housebroken pup in no time at all. I can not overstate how important consistency is to success. If you follow this protocol correctly and you still find yourself having problems with house soiling accidents it could be due to a medically related condition. If an examination reveals no problems tighten up the regiment in order to produce the positive results that you expect. If you do it the results will come!