

Housetraining Your Puppy

Housetraining a puppy requires time, vigilance, patience and commitment. Following the procedures outlined below, you can minimize house soiling incidents, but virtually every puppy will have an accident in the house (more likely several). Expect this—it's part of raising a puppy. The more consistent you are in following the basic housetraining procedures, the faster your puppy will learn acceptable behavior. It may take several weeks to housetrain your puppy, and with some of the smaller breeds, it might take longer.

Establish a Routine

- Like babies, puppies do best on a regular schedule. Take your puppy outside frequently, at least every two hours, and immediately after he wakes up from a nap, after playing and after eating.
- Praise your puppy lavishly every time he eliminates outdoors. You can even give him a treat. You must praise him and give him a treat immediately after he's finished eliminating, not after he comes back inside the house. This step is vital, because rewarding your dog for eliminating outdoors is the only way he'll know that's what you want him to do.
- Choose a location outside not too far from the door to be the bathroom spot. Always take your puppy, on a leash, directly to the bathroom spot. Take him for a walk or play with him only after he has eliminated. If you clean up an accident in the house, take the soiled rags or paper towels and leave them in the bathroom spot. The smell will help your puppy recognize the area as the place where he is supposed to eliminate. While your puppy is eliminating, use a word or phrase, like "go potty," that you can eventually use before he eliminates to remind him of what he's supposed to be doing.
- If possible, put your puppy on a regular feeding schedule. Depending on their age, puppies usually need to be fed three or four times a day. Feeding your puppy at the same time each day will make it more likely that he'll eliminate at consistent times as well. This makes housetraining easier for both of you.

Supervise, Supervise, Supervise

Don't give your puppy an opportunity to soil in the house. He should be watched at all times when he is indoors. You can tether him to you with a six-foot leash, or use baby gates to keep him in the room where you are. Watch for signs that he needs to eliminate like sniffing around or circling. When you see these signs immediately take him outside, on a leash, to his bathroom spot. If he eliminates, praise him lavishly and reward him with a treat.

Confinement

When you're unable to watch your puppy at all times, he should be confined to an area small enough that he won't want to eliminate there. It should be just big enough for him to comfortably stand, lie down and turn around in. This area could be a portion of a bathroom or a laundry room, blocked off with boxes or baby gates. Or you may want to crate train your puppy and use the crate to confine him (see: "Crate Training Your Dog"). If your puppy has spent several hours in confinement, when you let him out, take him directly to his bathroom spot and praise him when he eliminates.

Setting up the confinement area.

The ideal confinement area is easy to clean and easy to close off with a door or baby gate. It should be mostly free of furniture and non-puppy related objects. The best places for a confinement area are the kitchen, laundry room, bathroom, or an empty spare room. Furnish with:

- A puppy potty pad
- Your puppy's crate (with the door open)
- Water
- A chew toy or Kong®

Training Tip: Be patient. It may take several days or weeks for your puppy to get used to his confinement area.

Troubleshooting: If your puppy begins to howl, whine, or bark, wait until he has been quiet for at least 2 minutes before you respond. Otherwise, he will learn that whining or barking makes you appear or gets him out of the confinement area, and he will bark or cry more often and longer in the future.

Training Tip: When you plan to crate your puppy for longer than an hour, make sure he is well exercised, has gone potty, and is ready for a nap.

Troubleshooting: If your puppy is going to the bathroom in his crate, remove any bedding and make sure he has been pottied before you put him in the crate, and that he is not being left for too long. Make sure you are following the rules for good potty training. If all else fails, call us.

When do I give my puppy free run of the house?

Not until your puppy is chew trained as well as house-trained. This can be as late as 12-14 months old. At first, confine him to one room at a time. Choose a tiled room, like the kitchen or the bathroom, so accidents can be easily cleaned. Add a room each week your puppy is successful (accident-free), and supervise each time you introduce him to a new room.

Oops!

Expect your puppy to have an accident in the house—it's a normal part of housetraining a puppy.

- When you catch him in the act of eliminating in the house, do something to interrupt him, like make a startling noise (be careful not to scare him). Immediately take him to his bathroom spot, praise him and give him a treat if he finishes eliminating there.
- Don't punish your puppy for eliminating in the house. If you find a soiled area, it's too late to administer a correction. Do nothing but clean it up. Rubbing your puppy's nose in it, taking him to the spot and scolding him, or any other punishment or discipline, will only make him afraid of you or afraid to eliminate in your presence. Animals don't understand punishment after the fact even if it's only seconds later.
- Punishment will do more harm than good.
- Cleaning the spoiled area is very important because puppies are highly motivated to continue soiling in areas that smell like urine or feces (see: "Successful Cleaning to Remove Pet Odors and Stains").

It's extremely important that you use the supervision and confinement procedures outlined above to minimize the number of accidents. If you allow your puppy to eliminate frequently in the house, he'll get confused about where he's supposed to eliminate which will prolong the housetraining process.

Paper Training

A puppy under six months of age cannot be expected to control his bladder for more than a few hours at a time. If you have to be away from home for more than four or five hours a day, this may not be the best time for you to get a puppy. If you're already committed to having a puppy and have to be away from home for long periods of time, you'll need to train your puppy to eliminate in a specific place indoors. Be aware, however, that doing so can prolong the process of teaching him to eliminate outdoors. Teaching your puppy to eliminate on a newspaper may create a life-long surface preference, meaning that he may, even in adulthood, eliminate on any newspaper he finds lying around the house.

When your puppy must be left alone for long periods of time, confine him to an area with enough room for a sleeping space, a playing space and a separate place to eliminate. In the area designated as the elimination place, you can either use newspapers or a sod box. To make a sod box, place sod in a

container, like a child's small, plastic swimming pool. You can also find dog litter products at a pet supply store.

If you clean up an accident in the house, take the soiled rags or paper towels, and put them in the designated elimination place. The smell will help your puppy recognize the area as the place where he is supposed to eliminate.

Other Types of House Soiling Problems

If you've consistently followed the housetraining procedures and your puppy continues to eliminate in the house, there may be another reason for his behavior.

- **Medical Problems:** House soiling can often be caused by physical problems such as a urinary tract infection or a parasitic infection. Check with your veterinarian to rule out any possibility of infection or illness.
- **Submissive/Excitement Urination:** Some dogs, especially young ones, temporarily lose control of their bladders when they become excited or feel threatened. This usually occurs during greetings, intense play or when their territory has been invaded (see: "Territorial Marking Behavior in Dogs and Cats").
- **Separation Anxiety:** Dogs that become anxious when they're left alone may house soil as a result. Usually there are other symptoms such as destructive behavior or vocalization (see: "Separation Anxiety").
- **Fears or Phobias:** When animals become frightened, they may lose control of their bladder and/or bowels. If your puppy is afraid of loud noises, such as thunderstorms or fireworks, he may house soil when he's exposed to these sounds (see: "Helping Your Dog Overcome the Fear of Thunder and Other Startling Noises").