

Bringing Your Pup Home, Puppy Proofing, and First Night Alone

Prior to your pup coming home (or at least prior to it having free access to your house or garden) you should ensure that your garden is well fenced, and that you have removed from reach any items in your house or garden that could prove dangerous to your new family member. Particular items to note which have often caused serious problems when ingested or chewed are: antifreeze, garden supplies especially snail/slug baits, pesticides or mouse/rat poisons, household cleaners, medicines, power cords, chocolate, onions

Puppies require large amounts of sleep whilst they are young. Please ensure that your puppy has a safe warm place to sleep and that children understand the need for the puppy to get adequate rest.

Being a 'baby' your pup is going to be very excitable and playful, it is important that it is allowed to be a pup, but at the same time do not be hesitate in setting boundaries early and sticking to these. For example, don't let your pup jump all over you, your family or guests as this will soon become habitual and what's cute and funny at first will become a problem once your cute small fluffy puppy has matured. One useful training method is to teach your pup to sit quietly (initially on lead) when visitors arrive so that you instil from the start that the arrival of people is not an invitation for your dog to madly go about gaining as much attention as it can in whatever way it pleases.

The first night after you take your pup home will often be the first that it has faced alone. This is a time of understandable uncertainty for any puppy as it is use to close contact from its littermates when it is awake and when it is sleeping. Puppies are also use to waking up and playing at times throughout the night so the loneliness of a long stretch of night alone is something your puppy must get use to. Make sure you pup has a comfortable bed away from draughts.

If you are going to keep your pup inside overnight, put your pup outside to relieve itself before putting it to bed. At this stage puppies cannot fully control themselves and certainly cannot go all night without needing to go to the toilet so will need your assistance with this regard if it is to learn clean habits.

It is better for puppies to eat small meals more often and your puppy will require a minimum of two meals per day. This can be cut down to one meal a day after your dog reaches approximately nine months of age. Fresh water should be available to your pup at all times.

According to a variety of research into canine breeding and behaviour approximately 30 to 35% of a dogs ultimate behavioural makeup is genetic and the rest (60 to 65%) is attributed to its upbringing, training, socialisation, nutrition and health care. It is important that socialising of your puppy continues during this early but extremely critical period in its development, as this time will form the basis for all that your dog will be in the future. The more chances a puppy has to be exposed to new things and experiences the less bothered it will be throughout its life when faced with new or stressful situations. Unsocialised dogs can become shy, fearful, and defensive and can even become aggressive (fear aggression).

Consider attending puppy pre-school (Most Vet clinics now offer these), as well as considering attending obedience classes once your pup is old enough. Doing this together will build a strong bond of trust between you as well as providing you with the skills to guide your dogs behaviour; helping to make your time together time that you can really enjoy. A well-trained dog is a happy dog, as it is one that knows what is expected of it and who gains pleasure from pleasing you.

Housetraining

A puppy will need to 'go' many times a day (or night). A good schedule to start instilling housetraining is to take your pup outside to relieve itself whenever it wakes from a sleep, straight after every meal and again 30 minutes or so after a meal, and after play or any unusual excitement, and of course before taking it to its bed. Crates can be a useful tool to better manage the process overnight as long as you are willing and able to get up during the night to let the pup out to relieve itself.

During the process of housetraining do not allow your pup to wander unsupervised around your house where it may easily make mistakes. Mistakes will occur however you do not want to confuse the puppy by inadvertently reinforcing that messing in the house is acceptable by letting it make these mistakes because it has free rein to wander. As well as being useful for overnight, crates can be useful during the day if you have your pup inside but have a period of time (to answer a phone call, a knock at the door etc.) where you cannot watch the pup as thoroughly as you might normally.

Try to use the same door to take your pup outside so that it learns to associate this exit as a door that it can ask to go out of when it needs to. Praise your pup as soon as it relieves itself in an appropriate place. It will soon associate going to toilet outside as something that pleases you. Even if housebreaking is progressing well accidents do and will happen because puppies do not have full control until they are between five and six months of age. Your vigilance and commitment to the process of housebreaking will determine how quickly and effectively housebreaking occurs.

Crate Training

Crates come in a variety of sizes and shapes, many being collapsible for ease of transport. Try not to think of a crate as a cage, as this is a human response. Dogs think in very different ways than we do and crates (if used appropriately) provide a den like environment; a place of security for your dog and a positive place for you to provide confinement at times when this might be necessary. Many crates will also fit into cars, especially station wagons, providing a great way to meet current legislation about restraining dogs whilst in moving vehicles, not to mention offering protection to your dog in the event of a car accident.

Should your dog ever have to be kept overnight at a vets it will be placed in a crate and so crate training your dog will lesson the trauma experienced by your dog in such a situation. Also should your dog ever be injured and require you to keep it quiet at home, crating is an excellent way to do this, so once again previous training for your dog in being in a crate can be very advantageous.

When introducing puppies to crates, do so initially for short periods of time. It is a great idea to feed your dog in a crate when first crate training it. Your dog will soon associate a crate as a positive place. Never use a crate as a form of punishment for this will make your dog associate the crate as an unpleasant rather than positive environment to be.

Crates are extremely useful for housebreaking puppies providing the crate is not too large. All dogs have a natural instinct to not soil the area where they sleep. Therefore a puppy is less likely to go to the toilet in a crate but rather ask to be let out when it needs to go. Do not leave your pup unattended in a crate for long stretches of time at first. If using to housetrain at night you will need to get up at regular intervals to let your pup outside so it can go. Each night the time between intervals can be extended until your pup can go all night without needed to go out.

Teething / Chewing / Boredom and Toys

All puppies go through stages of chewing and destroying things, often associated with the period when it is teething and wanting to massage its gums by chewing on things. Your dog needs to be taught what are permissible items for it to chew and which are not. Always provide your puppy with toys or proper dog chew items and try to remove other likely items out of temptations way. In particular watch power cords as many puppies have seriously injured or killed themselves biting through live power cords. Also do be mindful of keeping objects out of reach that your puppy may chew and swallow, its amazing the sort of things that can end up down the throats of puppies causing dangerous obstructions. This is not exclusively an issue for puppies, some dogs continue to swallow items as adults so if your dog is prone to such behaviour do be mindful of whats left in its environment alone with it, as many dogs have died or nearly died as a result of obstructions from eating balls, rope know toys, blankets and all manner of other items.

Many behavioural problems such as barking, tearing washing from the line and digging stem from boredom. The real issue for preventing boredom is how you provide opportunities for your dog that stimulate its mind. Some of this will be your spending quality time with your dog (a dog is not an accessory to leave in your backyard alone all day and night), some of it will be taking your dog for walks or on family trips (do try to 'share' your life and its adventures with your newest family member), and some of this will be the things you provide to occupy your dog when it must be without your company.

Many people go overboard and buy huge numbers of toys, which they scatter around their house and yard, and wonder why these lie abandoned after a few days while your dog looks for something else to take it interest. Large numbers of toys are unnecessary but dogs do bore of toys easily after a few days. Give your dog a few toys and after a few days remove these and put them away in their toy box, giving your dog a new set of toys. A few days latter these toys are removed and the original toys returned. Your dog will treat these toys, which it has not seen for a few days as new and exciting again. You will still need to introduce new toys at times but they will last a lot longer using this technique.

Some toys are specifically made for certain breeds or breed types, for example tough 'staffy' balls are made to survive the extra pressure they can be placed under. Similar many toys have been designed for stimulating the minds of working breeds to relieve boredom. Many pet stores or canine behaviour trainers will be happy to provide further advice regarding specific situations.

The pet industry now has huge numbers of 'toys' designed to get your dog thinking while it plays, through being occupied with specific tasks such as very successful Kong chew toys and treat balls to home alone tug of war toys (which hang in trees – some incorporating treat balls within them). We have found treat balls particularly helpful for dogs that are by themselves as they make your dog 'work' for its food. With such devices remember to include any food placed in the treat ball within your calculations for the dog's daily food allowance, otherwise you might find it rapidly putting on excess weight.

