

HOUSETRAINING

What is successful housetraining?

Quite simply, your dog will not soil in the house or any other indoor area to which you may take him. You might choose to designate a particular area in your yard or deck that is to be his elimination area. By necessity, some apartment dwellers may choose to have their small dog eliminate on a puppy pad in the house. In any case, successful housetraining means that your dog will only eliminate in the area(s) you have chosen.

Some dogs may experience an unintentional release of urine, called submissive urination or intentionally urinate on a specific area, called marking. Later sections will address those issues.

Management:

The best way to train a dog or puppy not to soil in the house is to be proactive and prevent it from happening. “Keeping an eye on him” is more wishful thinking than a solution. He can dart behind the sofa when you turn your back for a second. Each time he goes in the house it becomes more of a habit and training becomes that much more difficult.

For a healthy dog, the best way to keep things dry and clean is with total management. When dealing with young puppies the easiest and most effective management method is crate training. With older dogs, you can employ a variety of methods. Remember, you are trying to prevent unwanted behavior.

For the duration of the training, your dog should spend every waking minute, 24/7, in one of the following places:

Exercise pen (X-Pen) on a surface that is easy to clean up.

Crate: Use a crate with all padding removed. Dogs will lay on a damp towel.

Tie-down: A short leash attached to a baseboard, or for smaller dogs, to an immovable object. While on a tie down, DO NOT leave a dog unattended.

Outside in a fenced yard: Not all day, but for reasonable intervals, some yard time when you are doing housework can be helpful.

With this kind of confinement, it is your responsibility to provide opportunities for your dog to eliminate at regular intervals. The younger the dog, the shorter the interval should be between opportunities. A rule of thumb would be about every two hours. If he seems restless or anxious, regardless of the interval time, immediately take him out! In addition, you should take him out when he wakes up in the morning, after a long nap, after a play session and 10 or 15 minutes after each meal.



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Training: Housetraining with Praise and Reward

Pre-planning:

Cue: Pick a word or phrase, such as “hurry up!” and use it every time you take him out.

Rewards: Go armed with small but really, really delicious treats, such as bits of chicken or steak. Be prepared to verbally praise if the dog responds to that as well.

Patterns: Go out the same door so the dog learns which way to the outside.

Training Routine: Accompany your dog outside.

Watch him out of the corner of your eye, so that your praise can come IMMEDIATELY after he finishes. If you wait a few seconds, he may think you are praising him for any number of unrelated things, from lifting a paw to scratching his left ear.

If he goes, your praise should be lavish, as if he had just invented the wheel. Then give him several of those great little treats and take him back in the house.

If he shows no interest in relieving himself after 5 minutes or so, take him back inside to one of the management places listed above, and try again in 15 minutes.

Repeat this every 15 minutes until he goes potty.

Hide your impatience as best you can.

Remember to greet success with the enthusiasm and delicious treats.

Housetraining an Older Dog:

If you adopted an older dog, he was relieving himself some place before you got him. If it was always on a certain surface – say dirt or gravel – he may think he is doing what you want when he refuses to go in the place you have selected as his personal bathroom. If he relieves himself when on walks, observe what surface he chooses. If he seems to prefer grass and you want him to go on the bricks in your patio, put a small amount of sod in your patio.

Repeat the above routine. Lead him to the spot with the sod. If this works, you can gradually cut down on the size of the sod until it is gone. For the best chance of this working, take your time reducing the size.

Teaching Your Dog to Ask to Go Out:

Observe your dog heading toward the door that you have taken him out before and if he stands there, open the door and go out with them. Over time, when the dog learns you will respond to this positioning, he is starting to tell you needs to go out.

OOPS!

Occasionally a dog will refuse to go outside, then pee on the floor the minute he gets in the house. He does not understand yet. Resist the urge to scream which may frighten him. He is not doing it to spite you. Just firm up management techniques.



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Regressions Notes:

During the rainy season, it is not uncommon for dogs to regress. However, when a housetrained dog regresses, have your vet check him for a possible urinary tract infection. If he gets a clean bill of health, the sooner you address the problem, the better. Should this happen, go back to square one, just as if he had never been housetrained. It will not take nearly as long as it did the first time, especially if you catch it early. It's also a wonderfully kind idea to provide a tent or protection from the elements for dogs as they head out to their business in the yard.

Never Punish Your Dog:

Elimination is a non-event in a dog's life that it is forgotten immediately. There is no room for punishment. Yelling after the fact harms the relationship and has no place in a teaching environment. He may conclude that you do not want him to go potty at all, and hide from you. The worst case scenario is that he will decide that you are dangerous and be afraid of you – certainly not the relationship you want with your dog.

You WILL be Successful:

Some dogs are very easy to house train, while others are much more difficult. If yours seems slow to catch on, and you are doing all the things you can to help him, don't assume he is stupid. After all, Einstein, though a genius in theoretical physics, had trouble learning to read, but he did eventually succeed. Your dog may never shine in physics or the written word, but with consistent training, he can succeed in the important job of being potty-trained.

Related Housetraining Issues:

Submissive Urination: Submissive urination is the sudden, spontaneous and unintentional release of urine. It is a submissive gesture by the dog meant to convey that he is not a threat. In addition, some dogs will urinate when they are extremely excited such as when greeting new people or dogs, during physical contact such as petting or when they are being scolded. A dog will tend to cower, tuck in his tail and exhibit other submissive gestures before he urinates.

The first step is to rule out any possible medical reasons with a visit to the vet. The second step is never, ever scold your dog! It will make the problem worse, not better.

Greeting Rituals:

Make sure greetings by everyone are low-key and calm.

If it happens when you greet your dog, try to greet him outside.

Make sure everyone in the household knows the procedures for greeting and any other rules for the dog. Consistency is very important.



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Marking: Dogs scent mark by urinating small amounts on vertical surfaces, usually while raising a leg. Both female and male dogs can urine mark. Dogs who urine mark might do so in a number of places including while on walks, when in their own homes and yards, and during visits to other locations.

It's actually not known exactly why dogs mark BUT:

Dogs who are reproductively intact are more likely to mark than spayed or neutered dogs.

Some dogs mark when they encounter something new in their environment.

Exciting social situations can trigger marking.

First, rule out any medical issues, and then try the following:

Clean soiled areas thoroughly with an enzymatic cleaner such as Nature's Miracle™.

Make previously soiled areas inaccessible or unpleasant by using something like double-sided sticky tape on the area.

Feed, treat and play with your dog in areas in which he has chosen to mark.

Consult with your vet about the use of anti-anxiety medications to supplement behavior modification in an anxious dog.

Try to resolve any conflicts between pets or reintroduce new pets in the household.

If you have a male dog, have him wear a bellyband.