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Housetraining Tips & Tricks

The essentials for housetraining your new puppy are these: patience, supervision, confinement and rewards.

First, show your puppy where you want her to eliminate. Lead your puppy on a leash to a particular area outside near the front or back door. Stand there for 3-5 minutes; if she goes, praise her and/or give her a treat. If she doesn't eliminate, go back inside. Every hour (when you're home) take her to this spot. Tell her to eliminate—"go potty", "hurry up", "do your business", whatever works for you – then give her attention or a treat when she does.

In addition, don't give your pup free roam of the house, even when you are home. Unless you're totally vigilant, she can sneak off, eliminate, and that undoes all your training about where she should go. Keep her tethered to you by a leash, or use a kennel or crate when your attention is elsewhere. Short term confinement helps you predict when she'll have to go, so you can show her where you want her to do it.

Crating puppies takes advantage of their natural tendency to keep their "area" clean. You should use a crate just large enough for your puppy to stand up and turn around; using a larger crate risks having her go off to one corner and eliminate if she can get away from it. You should only crate your puppy for short periods of time! That means the number of hours your puppy can reasonably be expected to "hold it" is equal to her age in months +1. That means a two month old puppy can be crated for no more than 2-3 hours. If you must leave her for longer periods, we recommend confining her to a bathroom, laundry room or kitchen (use a baby gate) and leave papers or pads out for her. Neighbors or pet-sitting services can be recruited to get her out every few hours. Every time she goes outside, it reinforces her housetraining, so it's worth the bother or expense to get the training done as soon as possible.

Some other tricks:

Feed on a schedule, so you know when your pup will need to eliminate. Things that make a puppy have to go are eating and exercise. Feed 2-3 meals a day, depending on your puppy's age and size, and leave the food down until it's gone, or for 30 minutes, whichever comes first.

Head to the same potty spot immediately after play, naps and meals to take advantage of the puppy's natural "emptying" cycle. Taking her to the same place also helps establish an association (and scent) to cue the desired behavior.

Don't paper train unless you always want your puppy to go inside. It's confusing for the puppy to tell her that it's okay to go inside some places, but not others. But papers or "wee wee pads" can be used for those times when you just can't be there and can't get anyone else to take her outside.

While your puppy is in the house under your direct observation, watch for indications she might need to eliminate, such as circling and sniffing. Immediately tell her "OUTSIDE!" and take her to the outdoor potty spot. Praise her or give a treat when she goes. If she makes a mistake – if you catch her in the act, say sternly "NO!" and pick her up and take her to the potty spot outside to finish. Reward her for finishing outdoors.

If you find a mess after the fact, rubbing her nose in it doesn't accomplish anything, she'll have no idea why you're punishing her. You have 10 seconds from the time something happens to correct her for it- after that time, she just won't make the connection. This underscores the need to have her on a leash tethered to you inside.

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