



Potty-Training

The first day a puppy comes into his new home, there is a sense of urgency that pushes us to potty-train him as quickly as possible. However, just like any other kind of training, potty-training requires patience, persistence, and consistency. Having a set plan for potty-training *before* you bring your new puppy home, will set you both up for success.

Here's the deal:

The first step in establishing your puppy's potty habits is to avoid the time-worn methods that have been proven to be wrong and counterproductive. Dogs live in the present—they think only about what they are doing and what is going on around them at the moment—punishing them after the fact is ineffective and futile. Rubbing your dog's nose in the accident, showing it to him and making a scene, or scolding him after the job has already been done, will only confuse him and very possibly make him fearful of you.

Consider this scenario: Your dog has urinated on the rug without you seeing him. As you walk into the room, he runs toward you. At the same time, you notice the spot on the rug and reprimand him. The last thing your dog did was run toward you, so in his mind, you have just punished him for coming to you. Ruh-roh!

You must catch your dog in the act for any correction to be an effective deterrent to that behavior. In regard to potty training, you must catch them literally mid-pee or mid-poop. If you miss the moment by two seconds, you are too late. Similarly, you must reward your dog *immediately* when he does something right (such as eliminating in his designated area), to clearly identify acceptable behavior.

Set your dog up for success:

The most important part of potty-training is to make sure your dog is crystal clear where you *do* want him to go potty. When you are at home, a puppy must never have free rein. If he wanders out of sight, your pup is definitely up to no good! You can consider things like keeping him on a tether looped around a heavy piece of furniture or attached to you with a hands-free belt leash. This way your dog may settle down beside you while you read, work at the computer, or watch television. When you cannot actively supervise your puppy, he should be confined to either a crate or long-term confinement area.

The purpose of long-term confinement is to confine your dog's natural behaviors (including peeing and pooping) to an area that is protected (thus preventing any mistakes around the house when you are not there). For a long-term confinement area, we prefer an exercise pen with vertical bars only (to prevent climbing). You can also use a small room with easy-to-clean floors like the bathroom or utility room. Provide your dog with fresh water, a number of stuffed chew toys for entertainment, a comfortable bed in one corner, and a puppy potty in the corner diagonally opposite from his bed.

A temporary indoor puppy potty is necessary if you need to leave your puppy for longer than he is capable of holding it. Indoor potties are also useful for inclement weather, or if you live in an apartment or high-rise. For an indoor potty, use a litter box filled with a real piece of sod, or one of the many artificial turf puppy potties that are available to purchase. We typically discourage the use of Puppy Pads as not only do the dogs tend to get addicted to them, but the pads usually become extra fun toys that the pups like to tear up and destroy.

Stay on schedule:

Times to take your dog out to potty:

1. Immediately after coming out of the crate (or any confinement area).
2. After every meal. Keep a log so you can determine how long it takes him to poop after he eats a meal, and how many times a day he poops. A log will help you see the pattern so you can predict and anticipate.
3. Approximately 15-20 minutes after drinking a lot of water.
4. After every play session.
5. Immediately after waking up.
6. Any time you observe any body language that looks like your puppy is sniffing, searching, or circling around for a place to go potty.
7. Immediately after catching them in the act of having an accident in the house.
8. If you think there is any possibility whatsoever that they may need to go (even if they just went).

Typically, your puppy can hold it approximately as many hours as months old he is. For instance, if a puppy is 3 months old, and they are empty, we can anticipate that they can hold it for 3 to 4 hours. *Never confine a puppy or an unhousetrained adult dog to a crate for longer than they can hold it.* A dog confined too long will be forced to soil his crate, making him extremely difficult to houstrain.

When you are in the beginning stages, take your puppy out every hour. Give your pup five minutes to empty himself. During the actual act of peeing or pooping, mark the moment with very soft verbal praise. We don't want your puppy to get too excited and cut off his potty before he is finished. Once you see his booty pop up, that is usually an indication that he is finished, and the *Potty Party* can begin! Praise him enthusiastically and offer a super delicious treat. It is important to establish the correct behavior *in your presence*. That way, if you later catch him eliminating in the house and have to interrupt him, it will be clear that it is only the chosen area that is unacceptable, and not the act of eliminating in your presence. Once your dog realizes that he can cash in his pee and poop for tasty treats, he will *want* to eliminate in his outside potty area. Pooping in the house just does not have comparable fringe benefits.

If your dog does not eliminate during the allotted five-minute toilet break, put him right back inside his crate for at least 10-15 minutes, and then take him immediately back outside to try again. The purpose of the crate confinement is to prevent any mistakes around the house when you cannot devote undivided attention to your dog and to *predict when your dog needs to go potty*. Confining a puppy to a small space inhibits elimination and teaches them to hold it since the dog does not want to soil his sleeping area. Consequently, your dog will want to go immediately upon release from confinement.

Prevent Mistakes:

The second most important part of potty training is ensuring that your puppy never has an accident in the house without you seeing it happen, in order to give him feedback. If you do catch your dog having an accident, mark the moment with verbal feedback to show your displeasure, such as “Oh, no! Let’s go outside!” (Feedback should never consist of screaming, nor should it be ugly or scary). Pick your puppy up, mid-pee or mid poop, and rush him to his designated area. The more mistakes your dog has, without you seeing it and giving appropriate feedback, the more he learns that sometimes it’s okay to go potty in the house. Mistakes are a disaster since they set a bad precedent and create bad habits, which can be hard to break. Consequently, you must prevent mistakes at all cost. Your objective is to prevent the elimination behavior *before* it starts, and this requires a certain amount of vigilance on your part. Stay on schedule and do not expect a young dog to communicate or indicate to you when they need to go potty. You must take responsibility for setting your new puppy up for success, you must stop him each time you catch him eliminating inside your home and reward him each time he goes in the right spot outdoors. Remember, consistency and patience are key to minimizing your dog’s confusion and helping him to understand exactly what the desired behavior is.