

BATTLE OF THE PUDDLE -- HOUSEBREAKING A DOG

Paper Training

Paper training is a good method you can use to win the "battle of the puddle," but it is not a necessary first step to outdoor training and should be avoided if you expect your dog to go outside eventually. When the two methods are combined, they often create confusion and may slow down the training process. For small dogs kept in an apartment, however, paper training often makes sense. It is also convenient when horrible weather strikes or when you must leave your dog home alone for long hours.

To paper train, start by using the same steps outlined in outdoor training. Confine the young puppy to a mistake-proof room or a restricted area for feeding and sleeping. You can give him free reign of your home later on when he gains total control.

Next pick a permanent corner in one room, such as a bathroom or a kitchen, for your dog's indoor bathroom, spread four to five layers of the newspaper there and bring your pup to this spot first thing in the morning, after every meal, after each nap, after every play period, and just before bedtime. Be patient, persistent, and consistent. Establish a routine that you follow every day. Most importantly, give plenty of praise when the dog performs correctly.

Encourage your pup further by leaving one damp section of paper on top of fresh papers in the desired area. This "scent marking" should bring the dog back time and again to the same spot. Slowly reduce the size of the surrounding papered area as the animal learns and improves.

Never hit the dog or rub his nose in the mess when he makes a mistake. Just scold him verbally and place him on his papers. Watch for signs that your pup needs to go, including barking, scratching, circling, and whining.

Clean up all mistakes quickly, using plenty of soap and water. If the merest whiff of urine is left, your pup's highly sensitive nose will sense it and he may repeat his error. Use a quick soak solution of four parts water to one part white vinegar and a good rug cleaner to erase urine stains from a carpet. Lemon juice also helps erase the smell of urine from rugs. A good detergent and disinfectant should do the job on a bare floor, but avoid ammonia because it smells a great deal like a dog's urine.

Outdoor Training

The best method of housebreaking is to train your puppy to go outside as soon as possible. By about two months of age, most dogs can start learning to relieve themselves outdoors.

For the first phase of housetraining, you must be with our pet during the day, every day. Begin by limiting the animal to a mistake-proof room or some other confined area for sleeping and eating. By nature, dogs will not soil their beds unless they must. Use your puppy's natural instincts to your advantage.

Next, bring your new pet to the desired outdoor spot as frequently as possible, particularly early in the morning, after every meal, after each exercise period, after every nap, and just before bedtime at night. Be patient, persistent, and encouraging. Establish a routine that you follow every day. Most importantly, give plenty of praise when your dog performs correctly.

When your pup makes a mistake (and they all do), never hit him or rub his nose in the mess. Your pet will not understand. Instead, if you catch him in the process, pick him up quickly and bring him outside. Scold him verbally if your must but remember that prevention is the best cure. Watch for signs that your puppy needs to go outside, including barking, scratching, circling, and whining.

Despite some early mistakes, your dog will soon get the message if you are persistent and consistent. By the age of about six or seven months, when most dogs develop total control, he'll probably be telling you when he needs to go, even if it's 4 a.m. The number of walks will gradually decrease to three or four a day as the dog becomes disciplined to your schedule.

It makes sense to clean up after your dog when he defecates, especially if he goes on a lawn or sidewalk. Poop scooping helps protect your pet's health since some canine diseases are transmitted through dog feces. Cleaning up after your dog is also the law in some areas, such as New York, Buffalo and Chicago.

Always remember to be patient and persistent. Your best friend won't let you down.

(Information bulletin from the ASPCA, 441 East 92nd Street, New York, NY 10028).