

Keys to Smooth Houstraining

Quick tips:

- Create a consistent schedule so your dog knows when it is time to go!
- A consistent feeding schedule will allow you to predict when your dog will need to go; center potty breaks around the feeding schedule.
- Potty breaks are not time for play; be efficient and only play after the job has been done!
- Never punish the dog; always use positive reinforcement techniques.
- Praise your dog when he pottys outside.
- Be patient! Houstraining takes time, consistency, and unconditional love for your new dog.

Your new dog should be kept in one of two places so that you can keep tabs on him while you get to know his bathroom habits:

- Within sight, inside of the house
- In a crate or a small area

Keeping tabs on your dog inside the house will help to prevent the dog from sneaking off and pottying somewhere inside. It will also help you to become familiar with your dog's behavior and signs that he needs to go out. Since dogs can't say, "Hey! I need to go out!" we need to learn what signals our dog does give that he needs to go out. If your dog is circling and sniffing the ground, wandering around looking for something to do, going to an area that he has soiled before and sniffing, looks distracted, paces, whines, or does anything you've noticed comes right before he goes potty, take him outside!

Keeping tabs on your dog outside is also important. When you are taking your dog outside to go potty, you don't want to just let him play and hope that he'll eventually go. This becomes impractical when you're getting ready to leave for work! Choose a spot outside where you want your dog to go potty. Each time you take him out, lead him to that spot and wait. Do not interact with him or allow him to play. You can either just wait, or use a cue like "go potty!"

As soon as he finishes his business, immediately give him a treat and praise. Only then should he be allowed to play. Even if you have a fenced-in yard, don't let your dog out and assume that he will potty while he's out there. You must keep an eye on him to witness that he actually goes potty. Otherwise, you may be in for a surprise when he comes back inside!

When you're not able to watch your dog, he should be confined to a crate or a dog proof area. This area should be small and have a floor that is easy to clean. Dogs generally will not choose to potty where they sleep or eat. Confining him will reduce the chance of him pottying in the house, and will also ensure that if he does potty in the house, you can clean it up appropriately and not find a surprise a few days later (See our handout on Crate Training). As your dog gets older and more reliable, you'll be able to leave him out for gradually increasing periods of time. We recommend confining him, at least to begin, during unsupervised times... unless you want to walk out of the bathroom after a shower and step directly into a puddle!



Cleaning Up Messes

While it is very important to avoid dog accidents in the house, it is equally important to clean up these messes thoroughly. Using the usual household cleaners is not sufficient. In order to completely clean up pet messes, you must use special enzyme cleaners designed for this purpose. Regular cleaners may clean up the mess so we can't smell it, but only enzyme cleaners will clean it up so that a pet can't smell it and be tempted to resoil the area. When you clean up the mess, even on hardwood or linoleum, clean up the solid waste or mop up the excess liquid. Next, clean the area and a space around the area following the directions on the enzyme cleaner. There are even enzyme cleaners that can be used in carpet steam machines that are very helpful in preventing resoiling.

Dealing with Accidents

If your dog has an accident in the house, don't scold him after the fact or rub his nose in it. Otherwise, by the time you notice the mess, the dog has forgotten about it and won't understand why you are angry! Just clean it up thoroughly and keep a better eye on your dog for next time. The only time that it is effective to scold an animal for messing in the house is if you catch him in the act. You can make a loud aversive sound during the act so he associates the noise with the act of pottying, but do not hit or punish the dog.

How Long Will This Take?

Although some people will tell you that their dog was housetrained in a day, this is not the norm. Don't be disheartened if the training takes a while or if you have setbacks. This is normal; it is a training process. So how long will it take? That depends on the dog as well as how you are training the dog.

Housetraining Puppies

Dogs generally don't like to soil in their crate. Sometimes they just can't help it, though. You cannot expect a 12 week old puppy to hold its bowels and bladder for 10 hours at a stretch. When you have a little puppy, the more often you can let him out the better. If you need to crate your pup to go to work, it is best if you can stop at home at lunchtime to allow a potty break, or have a friend stop by to let him out. This helps to set your puppy up for success; he'll start to realize that, if he can hold it just a little longer, someone will come to let him out to relieve himself.

Of course, it isn't always possible to leave work to let your puppy out. The general rule with medium to large sized puppies is that they can hold their bladder for their age in months, plus one's equivalent in hours. So, a 4 month old Labrador Retriever puppy can hold his bladder for up to 5 hours. This formula doesn't go on forever, though. A 12 month old puppy can't hold it's bladder for 13 hours! This formula doesn't apply to small breed dogs, who need to go more often.

When and How Often?

If you have a very young puppy, approximately 12 weeks and younger, you should take him outside about every half hour when he is active. When puppies are playing, running, chewing, or being very active, they may need to go out every 15 minutes. Up to the age of 20 weeks, puppies haven't really developed full bladder control and need to go out often.

Your puppy should be taken outside immediately after eating or drinking, after active play, after waking up, and immediately after being let out of his crate or confined area. It is best to feed your puppy on a regular schedule so that he'll develop the need to defecate on a regular basis. Whenever you're sitting inside and you think, "Hmm, maybe I should take the puppy out," get up immediately and take the puppy out. Otherwise, you're bound to have an accident.

With some exceptions based on their past, adult dogs should housetrain faster than puppies because they are capable of holding their bladder and bowels for longer periods of time. Do not expect any dog, even one who was previously housetrained, to never have an accident. Just like you need to be shown where the bathroom is at new places, an adult dog needs to be acclimated to its new surroundings. He will need to learn to communicate with you when he needs to go out, and you need to learn to understand him.

Visit www.ThinkingOutsideTheCage.org for more information and training class schedules.

