

Housebreaking

Introduction

First, be aware that many, if not most eight-week-old puppies will not be able to make it through the night for at least a few weeks. Generally speaking, the larger breeds can accomplish this earlier than the small breeds. By far the easiest way to potty train a puppy is through CRATE TRAINING.

I prefer plastic crates, such as Vari-kennels. They are more den-like than the wire crates, they are lighter and easier to take apart and transport and it is harder for puppies/dogs to simply pee out through the sides (although the wire door is occasionally used for this).

When using the crate for potty-training, it is important that the puppy have an area only big enough to stand up, turn around, and lie down fully. You do NOT want the pup to have the possibility of eliminating at one end of the crate and curling up in the other.

Crate training works because the puppy's natural instinct is not to eliminate where he sleeps. This instinct also applies to where he eats, so to increase the inhibition to "go" in the crate, I also advise feeding all meals in the crate. In a case where a pup is having accidents in his crate, I advise actually putting the food (and scattering it, if it is kibble) on the crate bottom itself so the dog is actually eating off the crate floor.

In the beginning you will want minimal, if any, bedding in the crate (perhaps an old towel, but nothing easily shred-able) both because bedding will absorb pee and the pup may be fine with that, whereas s/he won't be fine with sitting in a pool of it, and because of the risk of the puppy chewing and ingesting it – potentially leading to an intestinal blockage that can mean surgery or even death.

IMPORTANT: your puppy will be naturally inhibited from eliminating in his crate, but his bladder is only so big and at a certain point he has NO choice. It is your job, above all else, to make sure he is taken out frequently enough that he does not eliminate in the crate. If he gets accustomed to eliminating in the crate, it will be MANY times harder to housebreak him because you have lost the instinct to stay clean. This is why puppy mill/pet store pups are often very difficult to housebreak: they have become used to sitting in their mess.

The rule of thumb for how long a pup can stay clean in his crate in the daytime is one hour for every month of life plus one. So an 8 week old puppy can generally last 2 to 3 hours, assuming he eliminated just before being crated. Just as humans can go longer at night, so can pups, but the smaller the breed, generally the longer it is before they can last the night.

The best thing for everyone is for the puppy to initially sleep as near you as you can tolerate, but **IN HIS CRATE**. He will settle down better if he is near you, **AND** he will go back to sleep more readily after getting you up to take him out if you are close enough to hear him before he works himself into a lather. Take him out to potty last thing before you go to bed, even if he has been asleep for awhile already. You can also help matters by keeping his meals regular (do NOT free feed – that results in little poops all day long!)

and by taking up his water a couple of hours before you go to bed. If you do that, commit to NOT exercising the pup to a point of thirst after the water is taken up.

Ideally the pup will already be acclimated to a crate from the breeder. If this is not the case, if at all possible, spend some time the first day letting him explore and get used to the crate without being locked in it. Feed him in it, throw treats and toys in it, but don't close it on him right away unless the breeder has already gotten him used to being crated.

Again, the reason crate training works is that it makes use of a puppy's natural inhibition against eliminating in his den. Be aware that, although you know that the whole house is "the den" and therefore off-limits for elimination, the puppy does not instinctively know this and needs to be taught gradually. You do this by initially keeping the pup in his crate **WHENEVER** he is unsupervised. At all other times, you must be on top of him, ideally meaning that he actually on a leash with you in the house. The only way he will learn that the whole house is the den is if you are diligent in taking him outside:

1. As soon as he's woken up;
2. Within a few minutes of feeding;
3. After he's had some vigorous playtime;
4. Before re-crating.

In addition, if he has an accident, you need to "catch him in the act." Any correction of the puppy upon discovery **after the fact** that he has eliminated in the house will only be counter-productive. Unfortunately, the puppy cannot associate your displeasure with something he did more than 10 to 15 seconds before. If you **DO** catch him in the act, clap your hands to startle him as you say "no!", scoop him up and hurry him outside. If, as is ideal, he goes a little more outside, praise him "good potty!" or whatever word you use. Avoid being too harsh with correcting the puppy as he may just conclude that it's dangerous to "go" in front of you. Then you have a bigger problem as he may resist going outside if you are watching him. Praise praise praise when he does it outside!

Five Important Points About Housebreaking:

(1) take your puppy to as close as possible to the same spot outside to eliminate **EVERY** time . Do NOT take your puppy for long walks away from home with the goal of elimination -- the puppy learns where to eliminate by smelling where it eliminated before. If the puppy does not get the scent cue, it may very well hold it until it is back inside. Save the walking for **AFTER** the dog has eliminated in the yard.

(2) Keep elimination time (after every meal, after waking up, after exercise and before crating) **BORING**. Take the puppy on a leash to the designated area and just pace back and forth. You want to be particularly boring in the middle of the night. When the pup eliminates, use a word or phrase of your choosing "go potty", "do it" , "do business" whatever, and start saying it as the dog starts to eliminate. When the dog is finished, pair it with the word "good" as in "Good Go Potty!". This repetition will eventually help cue your dog to do it essentially on command -- worth its weight in gold in many situations. But don't start using it as a suggestion/command yet; **ONLY** use it when the dog is actually eliminating so that you "capture" the behavior.

(3) Invest in white vinegar and keep a jar filled with a 50-50 mix of water and white vinegar as well as Nature's Miracle (available at Petco and PetSmart) If the pup eliminates on the floor, clean it with the vinegar mixture. Use Nature's Miracle for carpets as vinegar can bleach them. If the pup eliminates on bedding or something you put in the laundry, add about ½ cup vinegar to the laundry. Regular laundry detergent will NOT eliminate the odor from the pup's point of view. It is critical to eliminate the scent cue to go to the same spot again. Common household cleaners -- esp. amonia-based ones, will also NOT do this job.

(4) Initially, confine the puppy to a small area, even when he is not crated. A kitchen, with an easily washable floor, is ideal. Gradually enlarge the area in which the puppy is allowed (still supervised!) only once he has become reliable in the smaller area. In this way, the puppy learns to expand the definition of the den. Expect some accidents as new areas are made available to the puppy. This is especially likely to occur in areas that are seldom-used (perhaps a basement, or a formal dining room) as the scent cues from people spending time there make it seem less like part of the den from the puppy's point of view. Puppies don't "sneak off" to piddle in those rooms; rather it's that they view them as not part of the den. You can help with the puppy's understanding by spending time with him in those areas AFTER you are sure he has recently eliminated. This issue tends to be more acute with small breeds in large houses – which if you think about it, makes sense.

(5) Unless you have a living/working situation that will require the dog to eliminate inside in the long haul, I recommend against paper training or pee pads because they teach the dog that it IS acceptable to go potty in the house. If at all possible, teach the pup from Day One that OUTSIDE is where we go potty. In any event, if at all possible, do NOT put papers or pee pads inside the crate. If you MUST have a way for the pup to eliminate when you are not home, confine him to a bathroom or invest in an X-Pen so that the pup can eliminate in a spot where he will not be sitting in it. Otherwise, the puppy will lose its instinct to keep the den clean and you will have a very difficult time.

The more "on top of" your puppy you can be in the first few weeks, the faster potty training will go. Ideally, an unhousebroken puppy should always be either outside, in his crate, on a leash (yes, in the house!), or actively engaged with a human – playing or cuddling. If you allow no exceptions until he is accident-free in a given area, housebreaking should go smoothly and quickly.

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