**Potty Training Dogs: How to Do It**

Potty training dogs is **easiest when they are young puppies**, and this rather long page outlines a basic method. There is a list of tips also.

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With adult dogs and older puppies who are not housebroken, you often have more of an uphill battle because they have some undesirable habits to unlearn. There’s a section on potty training dogs when they are older further down this page.

The key to success is the timing of IN and OUT. Young puppies take IN food or water and usually within 15 or 20 minutes, they pee or poop OUT.

So your job is to get the puppy to where you want him to be **in time for that OUT moment.**

You have a life and you won’t always be there, even if you are just answering the phone. So **cleanup** is part of the process of potty training dogs.

**Basics of the Method**

Here are the basics of a simple potty training routine for a puppy.

1. **Take him outside** (and stay till he’s done or a long time has gone by with no results):

* As soon as he wakes up in the morning (*You* don’t have to be awake.. much!)
* Right after his breakfast
* Right after his lunch
* Right after his naps
* Right after taking him out of his crate
* Right after his dinner
* Right after any snacks of much size
* Right before his bedtime
* If he whimpers in the night

Praise him in a cheery voice when he produces.

2. **Only feed him and give him water when you can take him outside right away.** Especially in a hot or dry climate, you would normally never let dogs be without access to fresh water, but for the weeks that you are training, this limitation will speed up the potty training process for your dog. There will be fewer accidents and so the dog will more quickly learn what you want. But use your judgment about any risk of dehydration. House training dogs and puppies is a matter of using judgment all along!

3. When he does pee or poop where you don’t want him to, **quietly clean it up** in a matter-of-fact way. This isn’t a time to talk either loving or annoyed talk to him; essentially ignore him while you do the cleanup. Certainly never yell or physically punish him in any way.

4. When you and he are both home, **keep him with you** as much as you can, whether at your side (a leash can be handy for this once he accepts it), in a confined area, or in a crate, or otherwise nearby. (If you are crate-training, do keep the puppy in the crate as little as possible.)



**Tips**

### Keep in mind that you are **building a relationship** at the same time that you are teaching him one of his first lessons. Think sometimes about what the world must look like from his perspective, filled with giants who are sometimes very loving and other times confusingly angry. Practice patience!

### Potty training dogs isn’t always fun — you are waiting for the puppy to go, in whatever your climate can dish up and at all times of day or night. If the puppy is running loose in a safe place, this is a good time to **do a few stretching exercises** while keeping an eye on him. Even if the puppy is on a leash, you may be able to do some simpler ones. If you do a bit of gardening or something else, be sure it doesn’t get your attention so much that you are distracted from your job of watching the puppy every moment, so you know when he has done his job.

### Don’t take him back in the house the very moment he has done his stuff. He is likely to notice that **the fun of being outside ends abruptly** once he eliminates, and this is not an idea you want him to come up with!

### My husband and I train our puppies by saying **“Do your stuff!”**just as they pee or poop. After they have heard the phrase maybe a few dozen times, you can begin using it to encourage them just before they are actually doing their stuff. Eventually, it will be helpful when you are walking them as adults. I must admit I have never had a dog who heard me say that and always immediately performed, but it does help them get the idea. It’s just part of my routine for potty training my dogs.

### If you are **clicker-training**, you could click when the dog did his stuff where you wanted him to, then give him a treat a few moments later, when he is done.

### Physically, **puppies vary in how old they are before they have control of elimination,** but if you bring your puppy home around the age of 8 weeks, which is considered the ideal age, expect a month or two of accidents. They will become rarer as this time goes on. I did have one Australian Shepherd who never once went in the house, from 8 weeks of age. On the other hand, my Basenji pup hated the heavy rain where we lived then and used the living room carpet for longer than I care to remember. I wasn’t sure how much was physical and how much was her attitude.

**Potty Training Older Puppies and Adult Dogs**

You can use **essentially the same routine** as for puppies, but you will need to be **much more vigilant and more patient**, for a longer time period. Once an animal (or a person!) learns a habit, it can take a long time for it to go away. In scientific terms, the behavior isn’t easily extinguished because the an intermittent reinforcement cycle is even more rewarding than an every-time one. In other words, if the dog now and then experiences a reward for eliminating in the house — and the reward can simply be the natural sense of relief — then his tendency will be to keep up the habit. (This doesn’t only apply to potty training dogs — it’s a general principle.)

How do you get around this? By **creating a situation where the dog never eliminates in the house.** This can be easier said than done, but keeping the dog in a crate, fenced yard, or outside pen when you are gone may be essential.

One part is easier with older dogs: that long list of times to take the puppy out can be reduced quite a lot, since the dog can physically wait much longer between pit stops. If you haven’t already figured out when your dog is most likely to need to go out, a little thought and observation should give you that information. **Middle-of-the-night trips are less likely with older dogs**.