

Potty Training My New Dog/Puppy

One of the most important first steps when you adopt a puppy is house training, aka potty training.

The process of training a puppy (or adult dog) to learn the appropriate time and place to eliminate takes determination and patience. The key is to remember that successful potty training is based on positive reinforcement instead of punishment.

So how do you potty train a puppy? What if you have adopted an adult dog that is not potty trained?

How to Potty Train a Puppy

Potty training should begin with developing a schedule that both you and your dog can follow. You may also wish to use a repeatable phrase, such as “bathroom” or “potty,” each time you take your dog to the elimination area so that they learn to associate that word with the action. Here are some do’s and don’ts of potty training a dog.

Do's of Potty Training a Puppy

Follow these tips, and you will have your puppy or adult dog potty trained before you know it!

Take Your Puppy Out Often

New puppies, especially those under 12 weeks of age, should be taken outside every one to two hours. Before 12 weeks of age, puppies are still developing the muscles necessary to hold their eliminations. It is also a good habit to take your puppy out after sleeping, playing, eating, or drinking.

Stick to a Feeding Schedule

Typically, it is recommended to feed your puppy two meals a day. Feed each meal at the same time each day. Dogs will naturally eliminate shortly after eating, so developing a consistent feeding schedule can avoid confusion and accidents in the house.

Use Crate Training as an Aid to Potty Training

Crate training is a very effective tool to help not only with potty training your puppy, but also with creating a safe place for your puppy to call home. Dogs are naturally den animals, so their instincts will tell them to find a quiet place to eat and rest at the end of the day.

Dogs do not like to eliminate where they sleep or eat, so training your puppy to be comfortable in a crate is a great way to prevent them from having accidents in the house. The crate should not be used as punishment, but it should be used whenever your puppy cannot be directly supervised and for naptime and bedtime.



Choosing the correct crate size is extremely important, especially for large breed dogs that grow rapidly during puppyhood. Keep in mind that your puppy should only have enough room to stand up, turn around, and lie down comfortably.

Any more room will give your dog room to rest in one corner and pee or poop in the other. Many crates come with a divider that can be moved as your puppy grows.

Always Practice Positive Reinforcement

Positive reinforcement is the key to successful potty training. Positive reinforcement will teach your puppy that they get rewarded for going to the bathroom outside.

Each time your puppy eliminates outside, immediately reward them with verbal praise, treats, or a favorite toy. The reward should immediately follow the event so that your puppy makes a positive association with eliminating outside.

Recognize When Your Puppy Needs to Go Out

Constant supervision is another important part of successful potty training a puppy. Learning the clues or signals that indicate that your puppy needs to eliminate will prevent unnecessary accidents in the house. Most dogs will sniff, make circles, wander off, whine, or sit by the door to indicate they need to go to the bathroom.

Put Your Puppy on a Leash for Potty Breaks

You should always put your puppy on a leash when you go outside for a potty break. This will not only help get them comfortable with being on a leash, but you will also be right there to reward the good behavior. After giving a positive reward, play with your puppy outside for a few minutes to avoid creating a negative connection with returning inside.

Don'ts of Potty Training a Puppy

You may have heard some conflicting advice on house training a puppy. Here is what you should NOT do.

Using Potty Pads with Crate Training

Puppy pee pads should not be used as a substitute for going outside, unless you have a special situation such as living in a high-rise apartment or have limited mobility. Allowing puppies to eliminate on potty pads inside the house can confuse your puppy about where they are allowed to eliminate. This may slow down the potty-training process and should be avoided if possible.

Using Punishment Instead of Positive Reinforcement

Punishment is never an acceptable or successful training methodology. Outdated “training techniques” used to suggest hitting a dog with a newspaper or rubbing their face in their excrement to “teach them a lesson.”

Dogs do not associate these behaviors with doing something wrong. Instead, punishment teaches your puppy to become fearful of their owners or other people who try to punish them. Remember that potty training takes patience and kindness!

Not Following a Schedule

Failing to adhere to a consistent potty break and feeding schedule can create confusion for your puppy, and therefore leads to more accidents in the house.

Having a puppy is a big responsibility, and it is the pet parents' job to stick with the schedule and constantly supervise your dog as you would a child. The more frequent trips outside, the better! The

more often your puppy is allowed to successfully eliminate outside, the more quickly they will become potty trained!

How to Potty Train an Adult Dog

Potty training an adult dog can be very similar to training a puppy, depending on the circumstances. Some adult dogs may have never been taught to go to the bathroom outside, so their muscles will need to be trained to hold their excrement.

Have your new pet examined by a veterinarian to ensure that they are healthy and do not have any underlying conditions that could prevent them from being successfully potty trained.

Generally, a dog is considered potty trained if he has gone one month without any accidents in the house. If it has been over a month and you are still having trouble, you may need to speak to your veterinarian or a trainer for additional advice.

Do's of Potty Training an Adult Dog

You may wish to say a phrase like “bathroom” or “potty” each time you take your dog outside so that they start to associate that phrase with eliminating. Here are some more tips to potty train your adult dog successfully.

Set a Schedule

As with puppies, potty training an adult dog should begin with developing a schedule that both you and your dog can follow and feeding two meals daily at around the same time each day. Adult dogs also naturally eliminate shortly after eating, so developing a consistent schedule of eating and potty breaks can avoid confusion and accidents in the house.

Limit Your Dog's Space While Potty Training

For adult dogs entering a new home, it is important to limit the amount of space they have access to while the house-training process is still in progress. This can be accomplished with baby gates or crate training. Each time your dog eliminates outside without accidents in the house, you can gradually increase the amount of space that they have access to.

Use Crate Training to Help with Potty Training

Crate training is also effective for adult dogs. Like puppies, they do not like to eliminate where they sleep or eat, so they will avoid eliminating in a crate they have come to call home. The crate you use to train your dog should only have enough room for them to stand up, turn around, and lie down.

While you are potty training, your dog should be crated during naptime and bedtime, and whenever your dog cannot be directly supervised. Never use the crate as a means of punishment. It is important to note that adult dogs may take more time to adjust to a crate. If your dog is showing signs of stress or anxiety with crate training, contact your veterinarian for other options.



Use Positive Reinforcement

Positive reinforcement is not just for puppies—it's the key to successful potty training for any dog, including adults.

Each time your dog eliminates outside, reward them with verbal praise, treats, or a favorite toy. Just as with puppies, positive reinforcement will teach your adult dog that they get rewarded for going to the bathroom outside.

Give the reward immediately after your dog eliminates outside, so that your dog makes a positive association with that behavior.

Recognize When Your Dog Needs to Go Out

Learning your adult dog's signs that they need to eliminate will prevent unnecessary accidents in the house. Just like puppies, adult dogs often sit by the door, whine, wander off, sniff, or make circles when they need to go to the bathroom.

Walk Your Dog on a Leash Instead of Just Letting Them Out in the Yard

During potty training, you should always walk your adult dog on leash to the appropriate elimination area. This ensures you will be close by to reward their good behavior. After giving a positive reward, remember to play with your dog outside for a few minutes to avoid creating a negative connection between eliminating and returning inside.

Don'ts of Potty Training an Adult Dog

Do not fall into these traps while potty training your adult dog.

Mixing Puppy Pads with Crate Training

Allowing your adult dog to eliminate on potty pads inside the house can be confusing for them as they are learning which areas are appropriate potty spots (and which are not). This may slow down the potty-training process and should be avoided if possible.

Using Punishment Instead of Positive Reinforcement

Whether you are training a puppy or an adult dog, punishment is never acceptable or successful. Never hit your dog with anything or rub their face in their excrement when your dog has an accident—these outdated tactics have been proven ineffective.

Dogs that are punished will often become fearful of their owners or other people who try to punish them. Potty training can be frustrating, but remember to practice patience and kindness, no matter how old your dog is!

Keeping Inconsistent Schedules

Failing to adhere to a regular routine can confuse your dog, leading to potty accidents in the house. Remember: It is your job to create and maintain a schedule, keeping constant watch over your dog. The more opportunities your dog has for successful elimination outside, the faster the potty-training process will go!

Resources

Brister J. Houstraining and crate training Dogs. Veterinary Information Network.

<https://veterinarypartner.vin.com/default.aspx?pid=19239&id=8562851>

Stepita Meredith. Houstraining and adult dog or rescue. Veterinary Information Network.

<https://veterinarypartner.vin.com/default.aspx?pid=19239&id=4951739>

