

Housetraining Your Adult Dog or Puppy

Having a reliably housetrained dog is a very important goal for most owners. Whether you've just gotten a puppy or adopted an older dog that isn't housetrained, the same training principles apply. A dog who was previously housetrained may need a refresher since time spent in a kennel or changes in their schedule can make even the best-trained dogs lose habits they developed in the past.

Help Them Understand What You Want

When you housetrain a dog, you're taking advantage of their built-in instincts to not soil their own den, or where they live. Most homes are larger than a dog's normal sized den so we must teach them that going in the house is not preferred and instead teach them when and where we would like for them to go.

There are two main ways that dogs will determine a preference for spots to eliminate – the smell and their “foot feel.”

Odors of urine and feces, whether they are their own or another dog's, will attract dogs back to the same spot. For this reason it is very important that all accidents and messes be cleaned thoroughly with an enzymatic cleaner (see "[Cleaning Pet Stains and Odors](#)").

When your dog is learning where they are going to eliminate, they will instinctually remember, and in the future begin to seek out, the material that is under foot when they eliminate. For this reason it is important that you make sure that each time your dog eliminates he is going on top of the surface that you ultimately want him to eliminate on. If your dog has created a habit of eliminating on



Additional Resources

Please contact our Behavior Team to speak with a skilled behavior specialist.

BehaviorTeam@spca.org

214-461-5169

www.spca.org/petuniversity

Look for the following books online:

Way to Go! How to Housetrain a Dog of Any Age
by Patricia McConnell, PhD
and Karen London, PhD.

carpet, pee pads, newspaper, concrete, or grass, then that will be the surface that he is most likely to seek out in the future when choosing a spot to eliminate.

It is up to you to make sure that your dog gets access to the surfaces that you want him to eliminate on and keep him off of and away from any of the surfaces that you do not want him to go on while he is still learning and clean up any accidents as soon as they happen.

Establish a Routine

Dogs naturally create a routine so by keeping your dog's eating and potty schedule on a routine, house training will be much more successful.

Feed your dog on a regular schedule instead of allowing your dog to graze on food all day. Place the food bowl down for 15 minutes and then pick up any unfinished food and the food bowl until the next meal time.

Take your dog outside at scheduled times throughout the day, including –

1. First thing in the morning
2. 10 minutes after meals
3. After play time, nap time, or meeting new people
4. Before bed time

Take your dog to the same spot to eliminate each time so that he gets accustomed to the odors and foot feel as well as he develops a habit of eliminating in this same place each time. Praise your dog and give him a delicious food treat immediately after he eliminates. Do not wait until you go back inside because then you will be rewarding the dog coming back inside rather than the act of going potty in the right place. Make sure you are using a food reward that is extra special like a bit of lunch meat or a piece of cheese rather than a dog treat that your dog gets at any other time.

Do not play with your dog or give him any attention until after he eliminates so that he doesn't get distracted from the task at hand. Also, if you take your dog for a walk during his potty outings, go to your designated potty spot first and wait until your dog has eliminated to go for a walk. This way your dog will learn that the faster he gets done with his business the faster he gets the things that he wants like walks and attention.

Supervise!

You must keep a careful eye on your dog at all times when you are house training. If you are not able to give your dog 100% of your attention then you should put your dog in a crate or confined area where messes can easily be cleaned. Be sure to allow your dog plenty of opportunities to go in the appropriate places before putting him in a crate or confined area.

Do not scold your dog, or otherwise punish them, for having accidents in front of you. This will only make your dog afraid to go in front of you, instead they will hide from you when they need to go.