

House-Training Boot Camp

One of the most frustrating experiences of owning a dog are those unexpected accidents. Whether you are teaching your dog to ask to go outdoors or relieve themselves on pads in a designated area, the following plan will help you to better understand and work with their bathroom habits. As with all training, this will take patience, dedication, and repetition.

If you are struggling with your pet, they have a sudden change in habits, or you notice a change to the quality/quantity of their poop or urine, please discuss this with your veterinarian.

1. **Regular Schedules.**

Water should, of course, be always provided (water restriction isn't required to housetrain). Meal feeding your dog will make the timing of elimination more predictable. Generally, dogs will defecate 20-30 minutes after a meal, so you can use this knowledge in deciding when to take your dogs outside. It may be helpful to make a log when your dog does happen to go until you develop a routine and learn your dog's individual elimination habits.

2. **Direct your dog to a selected toilet area outside the house.**

When you leave the house, it is best to take your dog directly to their designated area and keep them moving (walking them up and down the area) while using cue words such as "Go potty". Pre-elimination behaviors you should look for include sniffing, circling, and walking "straddle legged". It is important that this ritual take place in one area only so that your dog becomes attuned to the significance of the place. If the operation is a success, be sure to give your dog praise and a treat to positively reinforce the behavior.

Treats should be taken outside with you so you can give them immediately. If you wait until you come back inside, they could conclude that they get rewarded for coming inside and not actually going to the bathroom. Eventually, the awards can be given intermittently and then phased out. If a mission is unsuccessful after five minutes or so, your dog should be brought back inside and confined to one area. Wait 15-20 minutes and try again. Important times to take your pet out for elimination are first thing in the morning, around noon, late afternoon, and in the evening plus after a meal, waking up from a rest, and after playing. Puppies, of course, require that they be taken out more often.

3. **Confining inside the home.**

This should be done in correlation with the training discussed in number two. Confinement can be acquired using a crate, small exercise pen, or securing your pet in an area with a baby gate. The concept is to make sure that if your dog does manage to urinate/defecate in the house, it will be unable to escape the mess. Most self-respecting dogs will hold urine and feces for hours to avoid the possibility of such personal contamination. If the area is too large, your dog may be able to go in one end and sit at the other end, avoiding the mess and leading to your dog continually having accidents in the house. The surface of the containment area is also important. Dogs are less likely to eliminate on non-absorbent surfaces. Your dog should not be allowed unlimited access to the house until they can be deemed truly trustworthy.

4. **Proper Cleanup**

It is important to thoroughly clean all soiled areas with a professional odor neutralizer. The most important cleaners are "enzymatic cleaners" such as *Nature's Miracle*. The area should be soaked for a sufficient time to allow the enzymes to work, then wiped up. Covering the area with a cloth soaked in the solution can help delay evaporation and prolong the action of the enzymes. Vinegar and Ammonia, which may smell like urine to a dog, should not be used to clean messes. If the slightest trace of odor remains, the dog is likely to be attracted back to that same area to eliminate again.

5. **Positive Reinforcement ONLY.**

Under no circumstances should your dog be punished for soiling in the house. Do not yell, hit, or rub their face in the mess. If your dog is punished minutes or hours after the elimination, they will not connect your reaction to the accident. Using punishment can easily cause your dog to become frightened of you, making them scared to go to the bathroom in front of you. This makes the training process more difficult.

6. **Pad Training.**

Pads may be used temporarily to make cleaning up easier, or if the dog must be left longer than it can "hold it" but reliance on them for too long may ultimately make housetraining more confusing for your dog. However, if you plan to exclusively train your dog to use pads only, you can use the above training program. Clients who live in cities, apartments, harsh climates, or simply prefer pads can have excellent success with this training.