

# Fundamentals of Puppy Ownership

## Introduction

Responsible puppy ownership requires considerations such as breed selection, behavior, nutrition, healthcare, and bonding time. Failure to consider these factors can affect the puppy's well-being and possibly result in a disappointing experience. A rich relationship between owner and puppy can develop with minimal time, expense, and commitment.

## Fundamentals

Taking ownership of a puppy is comparable to adopting a new family member. It requires the willingness to assume responsibility for another living creature that requires attention and care. In time, a puppy can learn to become an ideal companion animal.

Prior to selecting your new pet, consider the breed, behavioral tendencies, nutrition, health care, bonding, grooming, obedience training, housebreaking, and living accommodations. Taking the time to research these factors, along with other information in this publication, should increase the likelihood of a satisfying and long-lasting relationship between you and your pet. For example, you can visit a veterinarian, search the Internet, read current publications, visit a local dog show, and consult with Extension experts and dog owners for helpful information.



## Breed Selection

The primary ways to categorize dog breeds are by group and size. First, examining dogs by group will tell you the history of the breed and how it is generally utilized. One particular dog group may be good for herding animals or hunting, while another one is good for protection. Group information can also determine how active a dog might be on a daily basis. For example, sporting or working dogs are usually highly active animals. Hounds, on the other hand, have a tendency to bay or howl, which is not ideal for urban living environments.

Second, categorizing dogs by their adult size will provide expectations on the general size of the breeds and living space they require. Papillon or Chihuahuan are small or toy dogs and are likely to weigh less than 20 pounds. Medium-sized dogs like the Spitz and Basset hound weigh anywhere from 20 to 50 pounds.

Depending on an owner's stature, toy, small, and medium-sized dogs make good lap and house dogs. These dogs are easier to handle when walking and are active enough to exercise in a small yard. Smaller dogs also have little appetites and are more affordable to feed.

Large dogs like a Husky, German shepherd, and a Dalmatian weigh between 50 and 100 pounds. And extra large or very large dogs like Great Dane or Bullmastiff weigh 100 pounds or more when fully grown. Both large and extra large dogs require adequate space for housing, significant amounts of food, and sufficient space to exercise.

## Behavior

Puppies tend to require special attention and are energetic and curious. Active and mischievous behavior is to be expected regardless of breed size. Puppies are generally unruly, clumsy, and inquisitive. They like to chew on things, bark or growl, and need to be housebroken. Providing discipline and toys that are solely for chewing will help puppies learn the difference between chew toys versus items that do not belong to them. There are sprays that have a bitter taste and can be sprayed on objects to discourage unwanted chewing.

Puppies often growl or bark when confronted with strange objects, trying to establish dominance over another animal, or just for attention. The first thing to do when a puppy is continuously barking is to investigate the cause. In the case of a new or strange object, the puppy may just need to become familiar with it in order to realize it's nothing to be concerned about. There are several things you can try if puppies bark at other animals.

- Say "no barking" in a loud, firm voice.
- If that does not work, take a rolled up newspaper and slap it across the open palm of your hand while saying, "No!"

- If that does not work, take an empty drink can, insert a few pebbles, tape over the top, and toss it in the general direction of the dog (without hitting the dog).

Any of these should act as a distraction to discourage the dog from continually barking. A final option is to use a squirt gun or spray bottle filled with water to squirt the dog. This will work in most situations, unless a puppy likes to be squirted.

## Nutrition

Puppies have nutritional needs like other animals. Adequate nutrition is important to keep them healthy as well as to assure proper growth and development. Ration nutrient intake by providing multiple well-spaced meals two to three times a day. Puppies need a variety of nutrients to stay healthy and to achieve their full potential growth. Basic nutrients include amino acids from protein, fats and fatty acids, carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals, and lots of fresh water. Also, puppies need a certain amount of energy in their diet to maintain their daily routine. Energy generally comes in the form of proteins, carbohydrates, and fats. A growing puppy starts out needing about twice as many calories per pound of body weight as an adult dog. Dogs do not require an all-meat diet. It is most important that they receive a balanced diet; meat is an option.

Opinions vary on whether to feed a puppy dry or canned food, vegetables, and human food as treats. The important factor is to meet their dietary needs. Consult with a veterinarian about food options for your dog.

## Health Care

Being a responsible health care provider for your puppy is fairly simple and affordable. No one wants to see an animal suffer due to poor health or neglect. Regular medical checkups, scheduled vaccinations, and parasite prevention are good health

practices for your dog. Also, remember that puppies grow into dogs with reproductive cycles. This is a factor you need to consider when selecting a male or female dog. Recommendations to keep your puppy healthy follow.

Health care exams should be a regular routine for your puppy. Puppies require more trips to the veterinarian, but those trips become less frequent as your pet matures. During the first visit, you can expect the following:

- Physical exam
- Educational puppy packet with health and vaccine records, along with tips on puppy care and behavioral concerns
- Controlling fleas and ticks
- Heartworm prevention
- Fecal examination for intestinal parasites with appropriate deworming
- Recommended vaccine boosters

A vaccination schedule is an important aspect of puppy health. The vaccination schedule below is recommended to ensure the overall health of your pets and protect them from potential encounters with infected animals. The rabies vaccination is also likely to be a requirement of most municipalities. Vaccines may include the following:

- DA2PP vaccination prevents canine distemper, infectious canine hepatitis, canine adenovirus type 2, parainfluenza, and parvovirus infections. This is administered every 3 to 4 weeks until 16 weeks of age. However, dogs more than 12 weeks old with unknown vaccination status will be given two vaccinations 3 to 4 weeks apart.
- Rabies vaccination is administered when puppies are 12 weeks of age or older.

- Additional vaccines such as Leptospirosis and Bordetella (Kennel Cough) will be discussed with your veterinarian to determine need; they will be given as prescribed.

Heartworms are a serious threat to dogs of all ages. An infestation can compromise their health and become fatal. While there is treatment, the best option is testing and preventive medicine. Testing for heartworms should begin when dogs are 7 or 8 months old. Monthly heartworm prevention year round is highly recommended. Experts may recommend follow-up testing every 1 to 2 years after initiating preventative testing.

## Zoonotic Diseases

While germs can be passed from dogs to people, a handler is not likely to get sick from touching or handling a puppy. The best prevention after handling a puppy, puppy saliva, or feces is to wash your hands with soap and water or hand sanitizer.

## Bonding

Puppies crave attention, positive interaction, and assurance just like children. Some people might call this "quality time." Consistency is the key when interacting with your dog. Never encourage your puppy to bite, chew, bark, or play tug-of-war; these are bad habits, and allowing them actually encourages the puppy to be dominating. As a form of social interaction, puppies should learn to accept other people and animals. They should never be allowed to be aggressive toward other animals, children, or adults. Two easy ways to bond with your companion animal is to spend quality time grooming or with obedience training classes and practice.

## Grooming

Grooming is part of responsible dog ownership and care. While some breeds require more maintenance than others, brushing their coats, nail trimming, and an occasional overall inspection can prevent or minimize the need for potentially costly healthcare treatments. While they may initially consider grooming a form of play, puppies will learn to enjoy the attention received during these sessions.

Also, the occasional brushing can reveal any external parasites such as fleas, lice, ear mites, or ticks. These external pests are annoying and can be readily dealt with by treating the dog, house, and yard area. Develop a working relationship with a groomer or veterinarian to learn more about parasite control.

Skin conditions such as mange, dandruff, flea, and tick bite reactions may develop and can be noticed while brushing. Shedding is normal in most breeds, but excessive shedding may be an underlying indicator of skin or health problems. Some previously stated conditions may require the attention of a veterinarian or professional groomer.

It is wise to work with dogs while they are young, so they can get used to being handled. In addition, they will also come to understand that being examined is a part of the bonding process. While grooming your dog, learn to examine its ears for



excessive dirt and wax buildup. With the help of your veterinarian, and some education and effort, you can learn to clean your puppy's ears as it becomes necessary. Learn to trim the puppy's toenails while it is young and easy to handle. Be careful not to cut them too short or a blood vessel may be cut and experience temporary bleeding. A groomer or veterinarian assistant can help a new puppy owner with many of these tasks.

## Training

It is a good idea to train puppies on the fundamentals of obedience. The fundamentals teach them how to behave under different circumstances, how to follow commands, and how to become more sociable when taught in a classroom setting with other puppies, people, and environments. Puppies also bond with their handler. For more information on basic obedience training, consult Alabama Extension's publication UNP-0097, *Obedience Training for Dogs*. Also, look in your local phone book, contact a local pet store, or search the Internet for obedience schools for dogs and their owners. Use key words such as "dog training" or "pet training." The time and money spent training your companion animal is a long-term investment that will provide a lasting and quality relationship between you and your dog.

## Housebreaking

Consistency, perseverance, and patience are fundamental requirements for housebreaking and behavior training a puppy. There are numerous options to consider when housebreaking a puppy. A puppy needs to learn that the outdoors is for playing and potty breaks, while indoors is for attention and quality time. Some people use old newspaper or "puppy pads" and train the puppy to soil them in the house. This is not recommended since it encourages the animal to pee or poop in the house.

Training a dog not to pee or poop in the house is always a challenge, and it may take a puppy a little time to become housebroken. One way to start is by "crate training" your puppy. This requires a plastic crate or metal crate with a plastic tray that is easy to clean. Make sure it is the appropriate size; also consider growth. A puppy will whine, cry, and bark at first but will eventually learn this is home.

Sometimes, putting a covering over the crate will provide the dog a sense of security. Placing a blanket, towel, and some toys in with the dog will also help to make the dog feel more at ease with its new shelter.

Here are some rules to follow during this training period:

- Every time the puppy is taken out of the crate, immediately take it outside onto the grass and allow it some time to relieve itself. If it does, give it abundant praise.
- Do not allow the puppy out of the crate unless it can be supervised the entire time.
- Accept the fact that accidents will occur. Puppies do not like to go to the bathroom in their crate but will if given no other choice.
- Do not allow the puppy to have access to food or water several hours prior to household sleep time or the time when you leave for work.
- Be prepared during the first few weeks of this training to take the puppy outside during the middle of the night.
- Immediately after waking or arriving home from work, remove the puppy from the crate and carry it outside for a "potty break." As it becomes better about not relieving itself in the house or crate, it can be trusted to walk out on its own.

If situations require you to be away from the home for extended periods of time, make arrangements for the puppy to spend time outside for potty breaks. You can leave the puppy outside in a dog pen or well-secured yard; hire the services of a dog caretaker, or make arrangements with a neighbor or friend to let the dog out when you are gone. Remember, a puppy must relieve itself about every 4 to 6 hours; otherwise, accidents are likely to occur.

The housebreaking process is a tedious one but well worth the effort. Expect some setbacks during the process. Much like a child, a puppy is expected to have accidents when exposed to new environments.

## Facilities

Proper feeding and watering containers are also products new puppy owners must consider. Make sure they are easy to clean, practical, and made of hard plastic or metal to withstand chewing and being overturned. Puppies are energetic, and food and water dishes could become toys when they are bored. Playfulness can lead to spilled food and/or water and a mess that attracts insects, rodents, or larger pests.

Whether a dog is kept indoors, outdoors, or both, provisions need to be made for shelter, preferably with a proper exercise and "potty" area. A crate or kennel is an ideal facility for a dog to spend some "alone time." Crates should be made of metal or plastic. They should also be sized appropriately, easy to clean, and easy to disassemble if needed for transportation.

Environmental conditions such as heat, direct sun, cold, rain, wind, and other inclement weather can affect a dog's health; puppies are particularly vulnerable. Dogs can become stressed by cold, rain, heat, and extended and direct sun exposure. Available water and shade is important in warmer climates. Water keeps them from dehydrating and allows them to cool their bodies. For example, a doghouse

under a shade tree will help to prevent heat exposure and sunburn. Yes, dogs with a light pigment and/or thin hair can easily become sunburned. Sunburns are just as painful to dogs as humans. Also, dogs tend to dig and lie in low-lying areas to cool their bodies, which can be a problem for some dog owners. Remember, outdoor doghouses protect dogs from extreme weather conditions.



## Conclusion

All breeds are unique and require proper care. It is important to conduct preliminary research to determine what dog is ideal for you, your family, and your general lifestyle. Also, take a look at your immediate surroundings and determine what dog is ideal for your current living space. Puppies are like children and require a lot of patience, home training, medical attention, exercise, and good old-fashioned love and care. The bottom line is to determine if you want to make the commitment to build a happy home and a lasting bond with your new pet. As the puppy grows and matures, you will appreciate the time and effort you spent in the early years.

## Household Considerations

While this publication focuses on puppies, it is important to consider the household situation. Determine if someone will be home to attend to the puppy's needs. If not, then determine how long the puppy will be left alone and if someone is available in the neighborhood to help you care for the puppy. Consider the young children in the home, their safety, and the safety of the puppy. Also, determine if you want to make this type of commitment. These are factors you should consider to ensure a long-lasting and happy relationship with your dog.

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