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Getting Ready for Training

I'm old enough to remember when displays of canine training gear at veterinary clinics and pet stores offered a limited selection of collars, leashes, and a few chew toys. Our choices today for pet training equipment seem endless, and it's easy to become overwhelmed and confused when you visit a pet super store or even peruse the pet section of eBay.

You don't need to own the latest in gadgetry to train your dog. It's more important that you form the proper leadership role with your dog than that you attempt to coerce him with a shock collar or ultrasonic device.

In this chapter, you learn about some of the equipment and supplies you'll want to have on hand when you begin training your dog. I'm going to be conservative and suggest basic equipment, and, where appropriate, alert you to products that you might consider if your budget allows for extras in the dog care arena or if your friends are hosting a shower for your new pooch.

In this chapter:

- * Preparing your dog's living spaces
- * Buying the equipment and supplies you will need for training



To do list

- Choose a crate or dog house
- Select a potty training method
- Decide on an area in your home and/or yard in which to locate your dog's toilet

Preparing Your Dog's Spaces

A wild or domesticated canine establishes a den—a place to feel safe, snug, and protected from the outside world. For the most part, your pet's den will be a crate, kennel, or dog house. His territory, which is the space he will guard from intruders, may extend to the entire house or backyard. His bathroom will be located in an area you select within this territory.

Things You'll Need



- Crate, kennel, bed, or dog house
- Exercise pen or baby gate
- Water and food bowls
- Chew toys
- Treats
- Soft towel or fleece baby blanket

Choosing and Locating the Crate

A crate (plastic, wire, or soft sided) becomes your puppy's den within your home. We want to take advantage of a dog's natural tendency to keep his den clean. Wild dogs and wolves eliminate in a place outside their den and away from where they eat and sleep.

Purchase a crate commensurate with the size of your dog or puppy. It should be large enough for the dog to stand up, turn around, and lie down comfortably, but refrain from buying the Taj Mahal model. You don't want the dog to think he has enough space to eliminate in one end of his crate and eat and sleep in the other. If you own a large breed puppy, you might have to buy a series of crates over time to allow for his increasing size, or, opt for a crate with dividers.

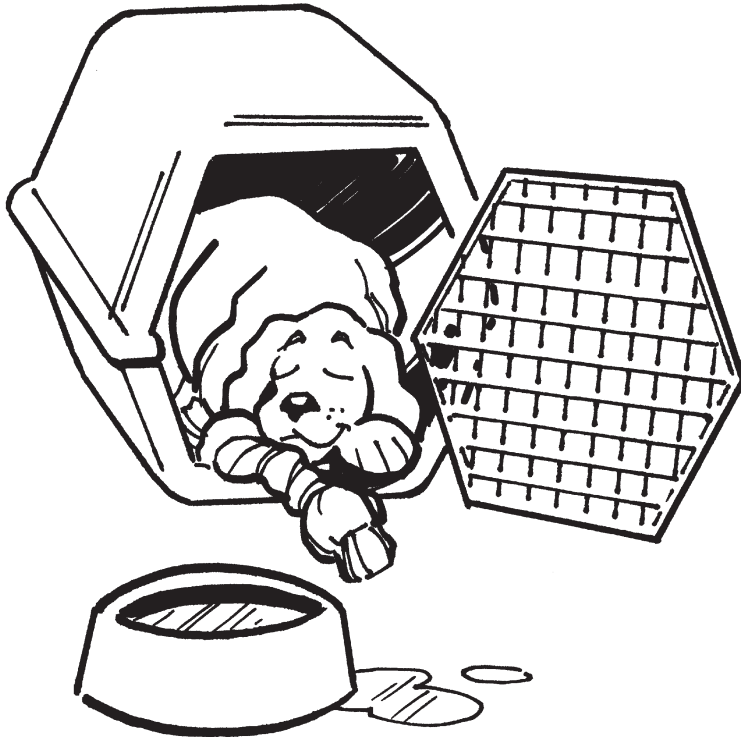
I suggest that you put the crate in an area of your home which is close to family activity without being in the middle of the action. You might find a space within the laundry room, kitchen, or mud room that will accommodate the crate. Most of these rooms have the added advantage of smooth, easily cleaned flooring. Enclose the room with a baby gate or use expandable exercise pens to create a puppy playpen within the room.

As seen in Figure 3.1, make the pup's crate welcoming by adding a soft towel or blanket. Later, you will introduce your dog to his new den by placing his water/feed bowls, toys, and treats inside.

caution Never bring a new dog into your home and allow him free access to the house. Confine him to a crate or to one room of the house. Expand his territory gradually and only when you are available to monitor his manners. Prepare your home by removing objects that might be toxic to or be swallowed by your pet.

FIGURE 3.1

Your puppy's crate is his home within your home.



Choosing and Locating the Dog House

Many of the same principles for selecting/placing a crate apply to selecting and placing a dog house. You can opt for a generic plastic igloo, or you can design or purchase a dog house resembling your own home or Cinderella's castle. Regardless, the house you select ought to be an appropriate size for your dog and protect him from the outside elements.

The dog should be able to stand up and look out the door without crouching and should be able to stretch out in a comfortable sleeping position. Locate the house in a well-drained area of the yard or patio and avoid facing it toward the prevailing wind or setting sun.

Things You'll Need



- Pooper scooper and bags
- Paper or canine litter or sod box system

Preparing for Yard, Paper, or Litter Box Training



One of the first acts of training you and your puppy or dog embark on together is that of toilet training. Choose the method you use carefully. Puppies that are paper and litter box trained can be taught later to go outside in the yard or park; however, surface (substrate) preferences imprinted early in life might be difficult to change at a later date.

Selecting an Outside Toilet

Choose a location in your yard that will be used specifically as the dog's potty, and give preference to an area that is a direct route out one of your home's doors. You will want to use the same door every time you take your puppy outside as you want him to learn to associate the act of going out the door and walking to this particular spot with the act of "going potty."

Paper and Litter or Sod Boxes

If you live in a high-rise apartment, have adopted a puppy during inclement weather, or want to avoid taking your dog outside late at night, consider training him to eliminate on paper or in a litter box or sod container.

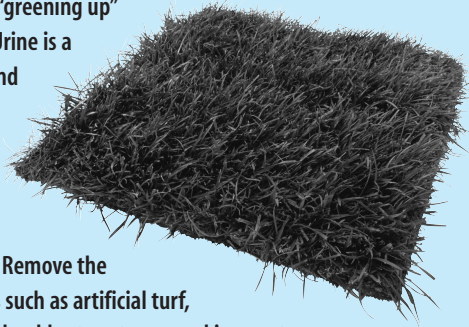
caution If you select paper training, don't line the dog's crate or bed with paper products.

YARD CONCERNS FOR DOG OWNERS

Dog urine and feces might have a fertilizer effect on grass called “greening up” or might cause the grass to burn, creating dead, brown patches. Urine is a bigger culprit than feces because urine is absorbed into the ground quicker.

To offset these potential problems, remove fecal deposits as soon as possible and water your yard after the dog has eliminated to dilute the urine effect.

A creative solution is to design an area specifically for dog waste. Remove the grass in this area and replace with a substrate that your dog likes such as artificial turf, pea-gravel, or mulch. Be creative and add a faux fireplug or large boulder to act as a marking post for male dogs.



If you choose newspapers or commercial potty training pads for your paper system, place them inside a small contained area opposite your puppy’s crate and feeding and water bowls. Keep the papers in the same location, and place a damp bottom paper on top of the new ones when you change papers to provide an odor clue that this is indeed the bathroom.



Second nature by Purina is an inexpensive litter box system for small dogs (less than \$20 for pan and instructions at most pet stores). The litter is larger than that used for cats and is made from absorbent paper. Boxes come in three sizes with the largest accommodating dogs up to thirty-five pounds. Place the box near the dog’s crate or bed but not directly adjacent to it. Define your dog’s territory, containing his crate/bed and litter pan, using your expandable exercise panels or baby gate.

A California company named PetaPotty offers a canine sod-based system, as shown in Figure 3.2. This company makes several container sizes that can be placed adjacent to each other to form a toilet system for larger dogs. You select real or artificial grass turf for the substrate material.

When your dog urinates in the box, waste drains through the turf and into a concealed trap pan. It is recommended that you flush the sod with water from a hose or bucket several times per week. Solid waste should be scooped and flushed down your commode. Depending on the size of dog and number of dogs using the system, you will have to replace grass sod every couple of months. The PetaPotty can be placed on a boat deck, patio or balcony, or within the apartment itself.

tip If you will be training your dog to go outside at a later date, prepare the dog for that surface. You might lay down a couple of concrete tiles under the papers or litter if you will eventually instruct an urban dog to eliminate curbside. If you intend the dog to eliminate on grass, rub grass and a little dirt into the training pad or papers.

FIGURE 3.2

Consider PetaPotty's sod container system for dogs confined on boats or in high-rise apartments.



For more information about PetaPotty, call (866) 738-7297 or visit the company's website at www.petapotty.com. This system ranges in cost from \$180 to \$260.



To do list

- Choose collars and leash
- Buy treats and toys
- Select cleaning supplies

Buying Equipment and Supplies

Preparing for a new dog is similar to planning a baby's layette. You need to accumulate certain supplies before bringing the new puppy or dog home.

Things You'll Need



- Collars, leash, and ID tag
- Treats, Kongs, and other toys
- Cleaning supplies for potty accidents

Choosing a Collar and Leash

You will need a basic cotton web, nylon, or leather rolled or flat collar with a buckle or snap-together clasp of the appropriate size for your dog. Collars come in half-inch lengths. If your dog has a lot of hair, the collar should fit under the coat and close to the skin. You should be able to slip one finger between the dog's skin and collar for small dogs and about two fingers under the collar of larger dogs.

A nylon slip collar, which tightens around the dog's neck, is effective for certain training exercises in which you really need to get your dog's attention. Measure the neck and add three inches for proper length. The collar should be just long enough to fit over the dog's head. To use this type of collar, give it a fast tighten and then just a quick release. If pressure on the neck is contraindicated (dogs with medical conditions affecting the neck), make do with the buckle collar or opt for a head collar or no-pull training harness.

For most situations, a four- or six-foot leather or cotton web leash is sufficient. The snap bolt should be the proper size for your dog. A toy dog dragging around a long leash with a heavy bolt is handicapped; conversely, you will be handicapped if you try to train a huge dog with a flimsy leash with a tiny snap bolt.

Even if your dog has permanent identity data such as a microchip or tattoo, attach an ID tag with your name, telephone number, and address to his collar when he travels outside your home.

Figure 3.3 shows some examples of these basic training supplies.

Selecting Treats

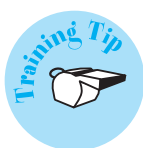
In Chapter 2, "What You Should Know About Training," we discussed using treats and praise or petting as positive reinforcement for encouraging your dog to perform an action. When you use food to persuade a beginner, reinforce the desired behavior each time it occurs. If you are training your puppy to sit on command, you must offer him a treat, such as a tidbit of weenie, and praise/petting each time he performs correctly.

note Some trainers are opposed to slip collars, especially the chain variety, because they can be used to "choke" the dog. Head collars and no-pull harnesses avoid the neck area by tightening around the dog's head in the former and his chest and shoulder blades in the latter case. See Chapter 5, "Graduating to Next-Level Basics," for a discussion of these training aids.

After he has mastered the trick, the food reward can be used intermittently and eventually phased out so that the puppy will perform for praise and petting alone.

FIGURE 3.3

You'll need buckle (1) and training (2) collars, plus leash (3), and ID (4) tag.



When using food as a positive reinforcer, present the smallest amount that will encourage your dog to perform. If the pup is particularly fond of liver snaps, give him a morsel (not the entire cookie) for correct execution of a simple task. This allows for more reinforcements per training session before the dog becomes full. Animal trainer Karen Pryor says that the reward should be based on the difficulty of the task. If your puppy makes a major training breakthrough—he comes when called off leash for the first time—reward him with the jackpot of a whole cookie.

TREATS

Here are some examples of treats you might use while training your dog:

Piece of dry cat food or puppy kibble

Small cube of cheese

Morsel of weenie/Vienna sausage

Tidbit of hard-boiled egg

Bite of regular ration

Commercial treat

Cooked meatball

Piece cooked, boneless chicken or fish



What You Should Know About Toys

Toys should be appropriate to your dog's size, activity level, and chewing preferences. In general, provide your dog with a variety of toys and rotate them weekly by offering only a few of the playthings at a time. Observe toys carefully, removing and destroying any that have become unsafe (due to cracking, unraveling, losing stuffing, and so on).

Items you might consider for your dog's toy box include



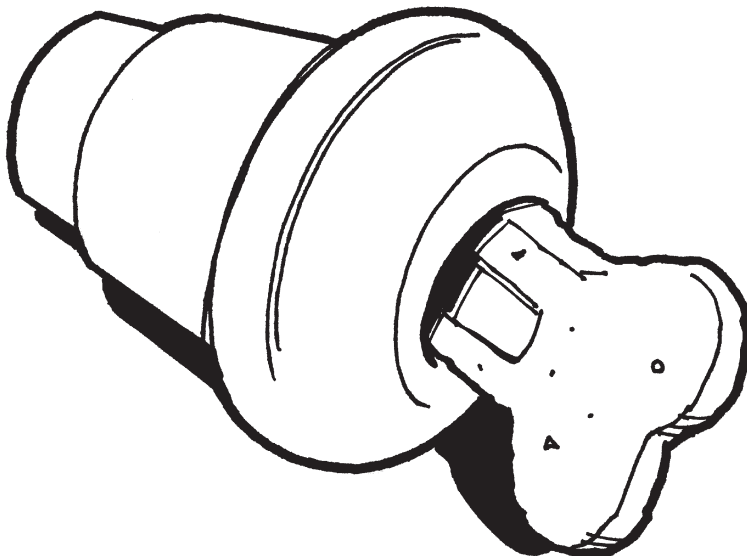
- Interactive toys such as balls or Frisbees.
- Objects for safe chewing and carrying around. These include hard, rubber toys such as Nylabone “bones” and Kong products available in a variety of shapes and sizes.
- Distraction toys include the Kongs and “busy boxes” with hiding places for treats; your dog gets to the goodies by moving or nosing the toy with his paws or muzzle (see Figure 3.4).
- Rope toys are available in various shapes with knotted ends and can provide a flossing action for teeth.
- Comfort toys (stuffed toys, for example) might be appropriate for certain dogs.

caution Select treats that are harmless to your pet. Avoid salty foods for dogs suffering from heart problems and select low-calorie treats for overweight dogs.

caution All dog toys can be abused. Toys too small, too flimsy, or fitted with squeakers, strings, eyes, or other attached items might be swallowed, leading to intestinal obstruction. Certain dogs can even misuse hard toys by chewing to the point of cracking teeth or by ingesting big chunks of rawhide or other material, leading to constipation or impaction.

FIGURE 3.4

Toys stuffed with food treats are great boredom relievers for your pet.



Selecting Cleaning Products for Training Accidents

Dogs can detect elimination odors imperceptible to us and, in many cases, are compelled to reapply urine or feces to the soiled area. In some cases, pet residues have been left by previously-owned pets, and in others the dog is reinforcing his own scent.

Regardless, it is important to neutralize and remove any trace odor of urine and feces so that the puppy or dog is not attracted back to urinate and defecate. After blotting with paper towels, apply a cleaning product containing natural enzymes to completely remove urine or fecal deposits.

Numerous enzymatic cleaners are available for purchase online or at stores. Urine-Off products are available at www.urine-off.com and Anti-Icky-Poo at www.mistermax.com or by calling (800) 745-1671.



note

In many cases, the lines blur between toys and treats. Kong and Nylabone companies offer products that provide both features. Visit Kong at www.kongcompany.com or (303) 216-2626 and Nylabone at www.nylabone.com or (800) 631-2188.



caution

Avoid cleaning products containing ammonia because they leave an odor similar to that of urine.

Summary

In this chapter, you've gotten ready for training by purchasing or acquiring the equipment you'll need. You've prepared the home and yard so that toilet and house training proceeds quickly and efficiently.

You've equipped your dog with collars and leash, selected treats and toys for relieving boredom and for rewarding proper behavior, and anticipated accidents by adding enzymatic solutions to your repertoire of cleaning supplies. In the next chapter, we start the actual training process. I hope that you are ready and raring to go.