



Tails of Success

The gentle, effective way to right your dog gone wrong

Housetraining: Set your dog up for Success

By Sherri Romig

The key to successful housetraining lies in preventing mistakes from occurring in the first place. It is much easier to teach a dog what you **do** want him to do than what you **don't**

want him to do. For example, when your dog goes potty in his designated potty spot and you celebrate, telling him what a great dog he is, giving him a special cookie and then playing, he thinks "Oh boy, this is great! I am going to go potty here all the time!" But, if he goes on the rug and you yell and punish him, he is thinking "Boy, Mom sure gets mad when I go potty. I better not let her see me do it again." Then the next time, he chooses to go potty behind the sofa or in the guest room where no one is there to see and scold him. So, for successful potty-training, we must set the dog up for success so he can learn that going potty outside is a wonderful thing.

Going in the Potty-Spot

When it is time to take the dog out to go, snap on his leash and bring him directly to his designated potty area. Ignore any of his attempts to engage you in play and wait quietly while he sniffs around for the perfect spot. Say his "potty cue" (go potty, hurry up, do your business, etc.) just as he squats down to go. (This will help him associate the potty-cue with the actual act and set the stage for going on command in the future.) Begin praising and give him a treat as soon as he finishes*. Then praise some more and enjoy a few minutes of playtime so that he can see how great going potty outside really is.

*using treats to potty train is optional. If you do decide to use them, be sure to give the treat just as he finishes eliminating, not later when he comes inside, so that he can associate the reward with the proper act (going potty, not coming inside).

Management (Preventing an Oops!)

Your dog must be supervised at ALL TIMES while housetraining. This means that he must be within your sight every moment that he is not in his crate. Turning your back for even a moment could result in an accident that sets the whole program back and ruins all of your hard work and success.

An easy way to keep the dog in your sight is to use his leash to tether him to your belt-loop. This way if you see any potty warning signals like sniffing and circling, you can whisk him out to the potty spot before it is too late. Be sure to celebrate for a job well done when he does it the right place. After a successful potty-trip, the dog can enjoy some closely supervised un-tethered playtime.

Setting up a Schedule (Preventing an Oops! 2)

Keeping the dog on a potty schedule is one of the easiest ways to help set him up for success. Knowing when the next potty break will be makes it much easier for him to wait. Your potty schedule will depend on the age of the dog and your lifestyle, but you will want to keep the following things in mind:

* The younger your dog, the more often he will have to go. You may want to begin by going out every 1-2 hours with a young pup.

* Puppies will need to potty as soon as they wake up, 15-20 min. after eating, heavy chewing, or playing, and before bed. You may want to schedule your dog's activities around times you know you will be able to take him out.

* Keep your dog on a meal schedule as well (rather letting him free-feed). This will make potty training much easier on both of you. (It can also help prevent weight-management problems later in life.)

* Your pup will have to potty more often when he is active than during quiet time.

* You can use a crate as a management tool, but keep in mind that a puppy should not be crated for more hours than his age in months +1, up to a maximum of 8 hours (i.e. a 5 month old puppy can be crated for up to 6 hours.) He will have to go potty immediately upon being let out.

* Playtime is a reward earned only after going potty. If your puppy doesn't go when you take him to his spot, put him back in his crate for a little while and then take him out to try again.

Oops!

If you catch your dog in the middle of an accident, make a sudden noise to stop him mid-stream, then pick him up and rush him out to the potty spot. Once there, praise and reward him for finishing up in the right place. Later, remember to clean the soiled area with an enzymatic cleaner and keep a closer eye on him from now on.

If you find an accident after it has already occurred, it is too late to do anything but clean it up with enzymatic cleaner. Punishing the dog now will only frighten and confuse him. There is no way he will associate being scolded now with the mess he left on the rug hours (or even minutes) ago. Remember to watch him more closely from now on, or go back to tethering so that he is always in your sight.

If you set your dog up for success through supervision, scheduling, and reward, you will find that he is potty trained in no time!