

Housetraining an Adult Dog or Rescue

With adult dogs, just like with a puppy, you need to supervise 100 percent of the time when they are indoors, until the habit of waiting to relieve themselves until they get outside is firmly established. If you are working with an adult dog who is not used to holding their bladder or bowels, they will need time to develop bladder and bowel control.

Supervising 100 percent of the time means that they are either in a "safe" area where they can't make a mistake, such as a crate or very small room with a baby-gate, or they are in the room with you and you are WATCHING them at all times. When a dog has a housetraining accident, it's not the dog's fault, it means the person failed in the supervision.

Confinement of some sort is necessary to keep the dog from making mistakes which will form the wrong habits on housebreaking. A crate is the size of a dog's bed, and dogs have a natural instinct to keep the bed clean. The crate is only to be used when no one can watch the dog.

Since dogs sleep 14 hours a day, a crate is a humane and reasonable way for many people to housebreak a dog, with the dog merely sleeping most of the time he is in the crate. Baby gates can be effective, but are not as secure as crates.

It's really a great service to a dog to teach him to rest calmly in a crate, even if you only use it for training and then put it away in the closet to save for emergencies. Dogs have to rest in crates when they are in for veterinary care, and other situations. If at some future time in his life the dog develops separation anxiety (where dogs may tear up the house due to feeling stressed), the ability to rest in a crate could save him in his home. And in case of travel and disasters, sometimes the only dogs who are able to stay with their owners are the dogs who can handle being in a crate. For an older dog, it's generally best to teach the crate a little at a time.

So, housetraining any dog of any age requires diligence, commitment, patience and good-nature from the owner. No punishment - punishment can cause huge problems. If you catch a dog in the act, you just rush the dog outside, with the goal of getting it to finish there so you can praise it for doing right. No time to be mad.

When the dog goes outside during housetraining, you need to go with the dog, every time, so you can praise at the right moment. This is a lot of work, too. But in the process, you get the dogs understanding what you want, and you figure out their schedule. Because you were there, you know whether they have relieved their bowels or bladder or both, and when.

Soon, you know how many times a day they need to do each of those functions. Dogs are not all the same about these needs, and the frequency also changes with age, illness, changes in diet, and changes in schedule - your schedule as well as the dogs' schedule.

Make sure all spots in the house where the dog might have relieved himself have been cleaned in the right manner to tell his keen sense of smell and doggy instincts that the house is not a bathroom. If you don't do this, the scent he can smell - even though you can't smell it - will draw him back to use the spot again. White vinegar will work only on a fresh spot that is still wet, and then the vinegar must be really saturated down through carpet and pad - it will smell strongly of vinegar for a day or so. Bacterial enzyme odor eliminator products (such as Nature's Miracle or Outright Pet Odor Eliminator) will work either on a fresh spot or on a spot that was not treated promptly. Deodorants and disinfectants normally used for cleaning don't remove this special scent that lures dogs to use the spot again. And perhaps the worst thing to use is ammonia, which actually signals the dog's nose that this is the spot!

Never punish your dog for a housebreaking mistake. He won't understand, and the punishment can create new problems. Instead, keep him in the room with you at all times when he is not in his special confinement area. If you see him start to have an accident, just say "No, Outside" as you rush out the door with him. Your goal is to get him to finish outside so you can praise him. Teach him the word "Outside" for going out there, and "Better Go Now" or some other phrase for actually relieving himself--these words are taught just by saying them at the right times, until he catches on to what they mean. This helps communication, and thus of course also helps training.

If the dog makes a mistake when you weren't watching him, oops, that was your mistake, not his. He is just a dog, and has no idea why we are upset when he relieves himself in the house. But most dogs can learn, if you are consistent, and help him avoid mistakes by being there for him.