

# Potty Training 101

**Establish a routine.** Dogs find comfort in routine. A schedule is particularly helpful for street dogs in establishing a sense of safety and security. A schedule also teaches them that there are times to eat, times to play and times to do their business. Generally speaking, a puppy can control their bladder one hour for every month of age. So, if the puppy is two months old, they can hold it for about two hours. Don't go longer than this between bathroom breaks. Adult dogs should be let out to go to the bathroom at least four times a day, so you want to give your pooch ample time to do his business when you're training.

**Take the dog outside frequently,** at least every two hours—and immediately after they wake up, during and after playing, and after eating or drinking.

**Pick a bathroom spot outside,** and always take the dog to that spot. Smelling his own scent can encourage him to go. While the dog is relieving themselves, use a specific word (like “potty”) or phrase (“good potty”) that you can eventually use before they go to remind them what to do. Take them out for a longer walk or some playtime only after they have eliminated.

**Reward the dog every time they eliminate outdoors.** Praise or give treats—but remember to do so immediately after they've finished, not after they come back inside. This step is vital, because rewarding your dog for going outdoors is the only way to teach what's expected of them. Before rewarding, be sure they're finished. Puppies in particular are easily distracted and if you praise too soon, they may forget to finish until they're back in the house.

**Put the dog on a regular feeding schedule.** What goes in on a schedule comes out on a schedule. Feeding the dog at the same times each day will make it more likely that they'll eliminate at consistent times as well, making housetraining easier for both of you.

**Pick up the dogs water dish about two and a half hours before bedtime** to reduce the likelihood that they'll need to relieve themselves during the night (this is most important for puppies). If the dog does wake you up in the night, don't make a big deal of it; otherwise they will think it is time to play and won't want to go back to sleep. Turn on as few lights as possible, don't talk to or play with the dog, take them out and then return them to bed.

**Supervise the Dog.** Don't give them an opportunity to soil in the house; keep an eye on them whenever they're indoors. Some dogs give very clear signals when they need to go, such as scratching at the door. Others don't. To prevent accidents while training, keep an eye out for the signals. If you can't do that, crating will be necessary to train them to hold it until you can take them outside.

**When you can't supervise, confine.** When you're unable to watch the dog at all times, restrict them to an area small enough that they won't want to eliminate there, such as a wire crate. The crate should be just big enough to comfortably stand, lie down and turn around. You can also use a portion of a bathroom or laundry room blocked off with baby gates. If the dog has spent several hours in confinement, you'll need to take them directly to their bathroom spot as soon as you return.

**Mistakes happen.** Expect the dog to have a few accidents in the house—it's a normal part of housetraining. Here's what to do when that happens:

You may have an urge to yell or punish the dog for eliminating inside, but all this does is make them afraid of you. When that happens, most dogs will simply hide when they need to go.

Interrupt the dog when you catch them in the act. Make a startling noise (be careful not to scare them) or say "OUTSIDE!" and immediately take them to their bathroom spot. Praise the dog and give a treat if they finish there. If the correction doesn't happen during the misbehavior, they won't make the connection.

Don't punish the dog for eliminating in the house. If you find a soiled area, it's too late to administer a correction. Just clean it up. Rubbing the dog's nose in it, taking them to the spot and scolding them or any other punishment will only make them afraid of you or afraid to eliminate in your presence. Punishment will often do more harm than good.

Scrub, scrub, scrub...No matter how vigilant you are, there are probably going to be accidents. Unfortunately, dogs tend to continue going where they've gone before, so you need to engage in some deep cleaning to really get the smell out of any soiled areas.

It's extremely important that you use these supervision and confinement procedures consistently to minimize the number of accidents. If the dog is eliminating frequently in the house, they'll get confused about where they're supposed to go, which will prolong the housetraining process.