

Around the Obedience Ring

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A New Puppy: Getting Sarded

Editor's note: This is the first in an excellent series of articles that has been divided into three important stages of puppy development: seven to nine weeks, nine weeks to three months, and three to five months. It is Connie's hope that these articles will not only help GRCA members, but will also be helpful for breeders to copy and give to their puppy buyers. Please feel free to copy and distribute this information wherever it might be helpful. Simply remember that when you do, the title and author must be clear, as well as the publication from which it was copied. Write GRNews@aol.com if you would like a PDF of this article sent to you electronically.



The excitement and anticipation of getting a new puppy is a special time. Use it also to formulate a plan for raising a companion that will be a joy to live with for a lifetime.

A New Puppy: Getting Started

There is probably no more exciting time in a dog owner's life than preparing for the arrival of a new puppy. After the careful consideration of the seemingly endless decisions...what breed, what sex, which breeder, which veterinarian, which food, a crate or not...you finally come to one of the most important of all: How are you going to train him?

Perhaps a bit of common sense will help you with some of these decisions. Begin by imagining how you want your adult dog to behave. The most enjoyable dog to own,

1. comes when he is called,
2. stays where he is put,
3. walks well on a leash,
4. only jumps up on people or furniture when invited,
5. plays with his toys and leaves your stuff alone, and
6. can be confined away from the family when necessary.

Think about it. If all the above statements described your dog, would you be happy? If you answered "yes" to all

or most of those statements, then get started with those goals in mind as soon as you bring your puppy home.

Seven to Nine Weeks – An Infant

It is common to bring a puppy home between seven and nine weeks of age. This age is irresistible, and you need to remember what an infant that little puppy is.

Feeding

There are so many dog foods, it will be easy to be overwhelmed by all your choices. You may want to ask your breeder what your puppy is used to eating. If that is not an option, buy a high-quality dry food that is appropriate in its nutritional make-up and kibble size to the breed of your puppy. If you invest in a good quality food, it should not be necessary to supplement your puppy, but this is something you should discuss with your veterinarian.

A seven-to-nine-week-old puppy will be happy to eat three times a day.

It will be easier to housebreak him if he eats on a schedule, so offer him some food, and when he loses interest and wanders away, pick it up and save it for the next meal. You may want to feed him some of his meals in his crate (see "Crate Training," below).

It is important for you to learn how to know if your puppy is the correct weight. A puppy carries extra weight over his ribs, so if you cannot easily feel his ribs, your puppy is probably overweight. However, if you can see the outline of his ribs, and especially his hip bones, he is underweight. Keep in mind that as he grows, the amount of food you feed him will be changing every few weeks, so measure your food, but make it a habit to look at him and feel his ribs so that you are ready to make changes as he grows.

Housebreaking

It's important for your puppy to explore his new surroundings, and it's fun to watch him do so. Let him look around, but remember that he will have to go to the bathroom very frequently so you must keep an eye on him (photo 1). A dog is a den animal, and he instinctively does not want to go to the bathroom where he lives. Unfortunately, most of us live in homes that are so big the dog does not equate our entire house with his den. Therefore, it is important to keep any dog, and especially a puppy, that is not housebroken in the room you are in. If you let him



Photo 1: Puppies like to explore and require constant supervision. Let your new puppy look around when you first bring him home, but remember he will need to go to the bathroom frequently.

leave the room, he will equate this with leaving the den and think it is acceptable to go to the bathroom. As you let him explore, keep him in the room you are in. If you are in the bedroom, shut him in the bedroom with you. If you go to the kitchen, take him with you. If it is not possible to shut a door, put up a gate or put a 10- to 15-foot rope on him to constrain him in the room with you.

Your puppy is much too young to let you know when he needs to go out; try to watch for signals that he needs to go outside. The signals may be subtle like wandering a few feet from where he was playing, sniffing and walking in circles. Don't make the mistake of watching the clock to determine when your puppy needs to go outside; it is his change in activity that causes him to need to go to the bathroom, not the time that has elapsed. Every time your puppy changes activities, he should be taken outside. If he wakes up, take him out; stops playing, out he goes; stops eating, out again. Take him out before the accident occurs.

If you have a particular place in the yard that you would like your puppy to go to the bathroom, begin by carrying him to that location and then setting him down. Don't try to walk him there. At this age, there's a good chance it's too far for him to travel before he stops to relieve himself. As he gets older he'll be able to make the trip himself.

If your puppy does have a house-breaking accident right in front of you, make an exclamation of disgust and take him outside ("No" or "Bad Dog" is

sufficient). It is not necessary to drag him to the mess or to rub his nose in it.

If your puppy goes to the bathroom in the house while you are not watching, there is absolutely nothing that you can do to correct him. Why? Dogs do not remember and feel responsible for actions in the past. If you drag a dog to an old mess and make a fuss, he does not say to himself, "I went to the bathroom there 20 minutes ago; that is why my owner is upset." Instead, he records the situation in his mind and makes sure the situation does

not occur again. In this case, the dog records, "If my owner is present, I am present and a mess is present, I will get scolded." The next time there is a mess on the floor and he hears you coming, he will run. Our tendency is to give the dog human reasoning and emotions. Owners are often heard saying, "But I know my dog knew he was bad, he ran from me and he looked guilty." He is not running from you because he understands that he is responsible for the mess, but because he realizes that if he stays in the situation that includes himself, you, and the mess, he will be scolded.

Crate Training

Crates are the cribs and playpens of dog training. A crate helps to prevent your dog from chewing and soiling the house. Crates protect a dog from consuming things in the house that could be harmful to *him*. A crate also calms anxious dogs and teaches hyperactive dogs to sleep when left alone. In addition, the crate becomes a home away from home whenever you are traveling with your dog.

Crates are not meant to be used to confine a dog for his entire lifetime any more than a playpen is used for the life of a child. They are simply a safe place for your puppy or adolescent dog to stay until he is housebroken and old enough to trust loose in your house or leave in your yard.

If the crate is used correctly, your

Around the Obedience Ring, *continued*

dog will regard it as a “room of his own.” It is a clean, comfortable, safe place to leave your dog when he cannot be supervised. Most dogs will try not to urinate or defecate in the crate, which is why it is so invaluable for housebreaking.

There are many types of crates, both plastic and metal, as well as varied opinions about how to introduce your dog to his crate, placement, bedding, food and toys, etc. The bottom line is, what makes you comfortable?



Photo 2: *Keep the crate door open for the first few meals and let him wander in and out. Note that this crate “fits” the puppy’s size.*

A small puppy does not need a large crate, so you don’t need to have a permanent place to put it. Just as most of us loathe laying down a new infant and listening to it scream, you probably won’t want to listen to your new puppy howl in his crate. There are few noises more pitiful than a mourning puppy that has been shut in his crate before he was ready for a nap. To introduce your dog to the crate, place the crate in a “people” area such as the kitchen or family room. What looks comfortable to you? If your puppy seems hot-natured, and the metal crate pan is cool, you may not want to put anything in the crate. If you think an old towel or blanket makes it look more appealing, then put one in there for bedding. Put your puppy’s toys and a few treats in the open crate and allow him to come and go as he wishes. At mealtimes, feed your puppy in the crate. Young puppies are sometimes slow to eat, so the first few meals you may keep the crate door open and let him wander in and out (photo 2). When your puppy’s appetite improves, feed him with the door closed and let him out when he’s fin-

ished. (Clean up any spills promptly – it’s very important for the crate to stay clean!) Your puppy doesn’t need to stay in his crate long, but he will become comfortable eating his meal there.

The real trick is to put your puppy in the crate when he is tired and ready for a nap. The first few nights always produce a bit of anxiety, so after taking your puppy out and playing with him until he seems ready for bed, slip him in his crate and turn out the lights. If you had planned to put the crate in a room other than your bedroom, he may cry, and you’ll have to decide if you can stand it. However, there is nothing wrong with slipping him in his crate next to your bed, turning out the light, and dangling your fingers through the side or door of the crate to comfort him as the two of you drift off to sleep.

If your puppy wakes you up at any time in the night, you must get up and take him out. It’s important that he learns that you will help him keep his crate clean. There is no need to play with him or feed him, simply let him go to the bathroom, and then return him to his crate.

When you put him back in the crate, he may fuss, and you are faced with a decision. If you take him to bed with you, he will quickly learn that waking you up gets him a reward, namely the rest of the night in your bed. You should probably try to ignore him, but again, if you are soft hearted and can’t stand the whining, having the crate next to your bed where you can comfort him may be the best decision for you.

Can you ever sleep with your puppy, or allow him to nap with you? Sure. However, balance that with having him sleep in his crate. Remember your overall goal is to teach him to be confined when necessary. As he gets older, you may not use the crate to confine him. You may just want to shut him in a bedroom or out in the yard while you entertain. This is the age to begin teaching him to be confined without complaining about it.

Years ago, my husband and I raised a Doberman puppy who was horrible about crying and whining in her crate. We slept with the crate near our bed, and she would whine continually. We tried the crate in another room with no luck. It didn’t seem to matter how tired she was when we put her in the crate, the whining began as soon as the door

was shut. Finally, in desperation, we put the crate in the car in the garage and went to bed. We’re not sure how long she whined the first night; fortunately we couldn’t hear her, nor could the neighbors. By the third night, she had given up her tantrums, and we were able to bring the crate back in the house. She was finally convinced that sometimes she would have to sleep quietly when confined.

Between seven and nine weeks, it is probably a good idea to let your puppy sleep in the crate all night, eat his meals in the crate, and stay in the crate whenever you have to leave him. This may seem like a lot of “crate time,” but try to remember that this is only for the short term, until your puppy gets a little older. Furthermore, a puppy at this age takes a lot of naps, and that is what he will learn to do whenever he is in the crate.



Photo 3: *An inquisitive puppy gets into trouble when left alone.*

When your puppy is comfortable with his crate, how long can he stay in his crate before he will need to go outside? Ideally, when he wakes from his nap and cries, you will be there to take him outside. However, the answer to this question may well be dictated by your lifestyle. No one wants to leave a puppy alone all day, however you may not have an option if you are working full time. If that is the case, you may do better to put your puppy in a large crate, with the front half holding bedding, and the back half covered in papers so that your puppy uses the back as a bathroom if he must relieve himself while you are gone. This is probably a safer option than leaving him loose in a small room in your house where he could chew a piece of furniture or electric cord (photo 3).



Photo 4: *These two littermates are learning early puppy socialization by play fighting.*

Raising my first puppy post-college while working full time, proved quite stressful for me. Fortunately, it was fall and the weather was cool, so during the first few weeks, because I felt guilty about leaving her all day, I simply put her crate in my car, and used my morning and lunch breaks to let her out in the parking lot and play with her for a few minutes. I felt better knowing that I could check on her a couple of times during the day.

Once a young puppy is sleeping through the night, he will more than likely stay clean during the same amount of time during the day. The self control of puppies varies, but almost all puppies are sleeping through the night by the age of three months. The older puppy's self-control is usually great enough that he can be left for eight or nine hours in the crate. But keep in mind that long confinements are likely to present other mental and physical difficulties. Crate or no crate, any dog consistently denied the companionship he needs is going to be a lonely pet and may still find ways – destructive ways – to express anxiety, boredom and stress.

Chewing

A small puppy comes to your home having learned to play with his littermates by chewing on them (photo 4). Your puppy is going to chew on you. It is inevitable, and it does not mean that he is a bad or aggressive puppy. He is simply trying to play with you the same way he played with his littermates. Unfortunately, his needle sharp teeth hurt, so you will want to stop him from biting you as quickly as possible.



Photo 5: *When your puppy bites you, make an exclamation of pain and give him a shake.*

When your puppy bites you, make an exclamation of pain and give him a shake. You are mimicking what his littermates did to him when he bit them too hard. You are biting him back, but you don't need to use your mouth to do so. It doesn't matter where you grab him. Young puppies have a lot of loose skin and you can grab him anywhere as you let him know that he hurt you. He should back away and look startled at your response. Your correction should be quick, and then it's over and you can continue playing with him as you were before he bit you (photo 5).

If you have a young child that you fear your puppy will hurt, encourage your child to play with the puppy with a toy so that the puppy has something to focus on besides the child's clothes or hands.

It is also inevitable that your

young puppy will want to chew on your shoes, the table legs and anything else that is at his eye level. When he does, simply remove the object, or move your puppy and give him a toy of his own. At this age you are wasting your time by scolding him. He is simply too young to care or to understand what your displeasure is about.

Introducing Your Puppy to Other Dogs

If you already have a dog, don't be in a hurry to introduce your puppy to your older dog. This can happen gradually over the next few weeks or even months. A seven- to-nine-week-old puppy of any breed is so small that it can be hurt by an older dog, even in play. However, if your older dog decides to discipline the puppy, there is a good chance the puppy can be seriously hurt. Let your older dog get to know the puppy by visiting with one another through a baby gate or crate. You have a whole lifetime to let them grow accustomed to one another. It doesn't need to happen in the first few days (photo 6).

Vaccinations and Vet Visits

Your puppy needs a series of "puppy shots" that start when he is six weeks old and end when he is four months old and able to have his first Rabies vaccine. Even if your puppy has already had his first vaccine, call your veterinarian as soon as you get him

home and find out when he wants you to bring him in for his first visit. Be sure to follow his guidelines for his needed boosters.

Remember, the above guidelines are for the first two weeks that you have your new puppy. The next article will give you information about the next stage of his development, nine to 12 weeks. ❖



Photo 6: *Introduce the new puppy to your older dog by using a babygate. A seven- to-nine-week-old puppy of any breed is so small that it can be hurt by an older dog, even in play.*