

Housetraining

House soiling is a spatial problem. Your dog has been allowed to eliminate in the wrong place. House-soiling quickly becomes a bad habit because dogs develop strong location, substrate, and olfactory preferences for their improvised indoor toilet areas.

To housetrain your dog quickly, humanely and permanently, you'll need a dog crate, a number of chew toys and some very tasty treats, such as freeze-dried liver.

These are your main goals:

1. Prevent mistakes.
2. Teach your dog where you would like him to eliminate.

Prevent Mistakes

Mistakes set a bad precedent and create bad habits, which can be hard to break. Consequently, you must prevent mistakes at all cost. Whenever you are not at home, leave your dog in a long-term confinement area, such as a single room indoors with easy-to-clean floors (bathroom, kitchen or utility room) – this will be your dog's playroom.

Provide your dog with fresh water, a number of stuffed chew toys for entertainment, a comfortable bed in one corner, and a doggy toilet in the corner diagonally opposite from his bed. Your dog will naturally want to eliminate as far as possible from his bed, and so will soon develop the good habit of using his toilet. Good habits are just as hard to break as bad habits!

For a doggy toilet, use a litter box lined with either a roll of turf (ideally) or absorbent housebreaking pads sprinkled with soil or grass clippings, or a litter box filled with concrete pavers, if your dog will eventually be eliminating on concrete.

Thus your dog will develop olfactory and substrate preferences for eliminating on soil, grass or concrete.

Long-term confinement confines your dog's natural behaviors, such as urinating and defecating, to an area that is protected, thus preventing any mistakes around the house when you are not there. Long-term confinement also helps your dog quickly develop a strong preference for eliminating on soil, grass or concrete.

Teach Your Dog to Eliminate in the Right Place

When you are at home, confine your dog to a short-term confinement area with a number of stuffed chew toys for entertainment. A portable dog crate makes an ideal doggy den. Alternatively, keep your dog on a short leash fastened to an eyehook in the baseboard near her bed, or attach the leash to your belt. This way your dog may settle down beside you while you read, work at the computer, or watch television.

Every hour on the hour, say, "Let's go pee and poop" (or some other appropriate toilet instruction), and hurry your dog, on leash, to her toilet (in your yard, or at curbside outside the front door of your house or apartment building). Stand still with your dog on leash and repeat the instruction to eliminate. Give your dog three minutes to empty her/himself.

baby gates. Or you may want to crate train your dog and use the crate to confine him (see our handout: "Crate Training Your Dog"). If he has spent several hours in confinement, when you let him out, take him directly to his bathroom spot and praise him when he eliminates.

Oops!

Most dogs, at some point, will have an accident in the house. You should expect this, as it is a normal part of your dog's adjustment to his new home.

- If you catch your dog in the act of eliminating in the house, do something to interrupt him like making a startling noise (be careful not to scare him). Immediately take him to his bathroom spot, praise him, and give him a treat if he finishes eliminating there.
- Do not punish your dog for eliminating in the house. If you find a soiled area, it is too late to administer a correction. Do nothing but clean it up. Rubbing your dog's nose in it, taking him to the spot and scolding him, or any other type of punishment, will only make him afraid of you or afraid to eliminate in your presence. Animals do not understand punishment after the fact, even if it is only seconds later. Punishment will do more harm than good.
- Cleaning the soiled area is very important because dogs are highly motivated to continue soiling in areas that smell like urine or feces (see our handout: "Successful Cleaning to Remove Pet Odors and Stains").

Other Types of Housesoiling Problems

If you have consistently followed the housetraining procedures and your dog continues to eliminate in the house, there may be another reason for his behavior.

- **Medical Problems:** House soiling can often be caused by physical problems such as a urinary tract infection or a parasite infection. Check with your veterinarian to rule out any possibility of disease or illness.
- **Submissive/Excitement Urination:** Some dogs, especially young ones, temporarily lose control of their bladders when they become excited or feel threatened. This usually occurs during greetings, intense play or when they are about to be punished (see our handout: "Submissive and Excitement Urination").
- **Territorial Urine-Marking:** Dogs sometimes deposit urine or feces, usually in small amounts, to scent-mark their territory. Both male and female dogs do this, and it most often occurs when they believe their territory has been invaded (see our handout: "Territorial Marking Behavior in Dogs and Cats").
- **Separation Anxiety.** Dogs that become anxious when they are left alone may house soil as a result. Usually, there are other symptoms, such as destructive behavior or vocalization (see our handout: "Separation Anxiety").
- **Fears or Phobias.** When animals become frightened, they may lose control of their bladder and/or bowels. If your dog is afraid of loud noises, such as thunderstorms or fireworks, he may house soil when he is exposed to these sounds (see our handout: "Helping Your Dog Overcome the Fear of Thunder and Other Startling Noises").
- **Surface Preferences.** When a dog has been trained to eliminate on only one type of surface, such as newspapers, or has not been offered a variety of surfaces, such as being confined to a run with a concrete floor, a surface preference may develop. This can be difficult to change but is often managed by ensuring that their preferred substrate is unavailable indoors, but is available in an outdoor location.