

Before Puppy Arrives

January 2009

By Peter Wax

Before your puppy comes home you should prepare a safe and healthy environment for him or her to live in. Things to consider are where the pup will eat, sleep, spend the day, and defecate. An 8-week old French Brittany cannot survive cold temperatures without a heat source and protection from the elements and an adult cannot survive freezing much less sub-zero temperatures without adequate shelter and insulation. So if you are planning on keeping your pup outdoors for extended periods of time you will either need to make appropriate accommodation or find a different breed.

I do not believe you can freeze an adult Labrador or Chesapeake Bay retriever to death as long as you give them protection in the form of a dog house full of straw or similar housing but here in North Dakota, adult short and fine-haired hunting dogs are frozen to death on the cement floor of the garage every winter. As one shorthaired pointer owner's 8 and 10 year old children found out one morning - a nylon rug in the garage does not cut it - but at least there were no hairs in the house.

A chain-link fence (tight to the ground) or a chain-link run of twelve feet length or more on a cement pad are safe places to go to the bathroom and hang out for your puppy, if neither of these are possible, your pup will do fine on a chain or wire tie out for monitored periods of time as long as there is shade and water in the summer and appropriate shelter in the winter.

A nylon or cotton rope is not appropriate material to tie out a puppy with, as eventually pup will learn to chew free. A lesson that once learned is impossible to unlearn and now you will have a life time of trouble when it comes to leashes, check cords and even safety-belts in your vehicle which cost \$75.00 and up installed.

Additionally, a bored puppy in your back yard is a mischievous menace of unlimited proportion. A bored 6 month old French Brittany pup left to his or her own devices in an open backyard can dig a hundred holes (some over two feet deep and three long), escape a five foot chain-linked fence, destroy the garden, eat a garden hose and disturb the entire neighborhood with barking. You will reinforce all of these behaviors when you finally return home and show attention for the wonderful things he or she has learned. So while a fenced-in backyard is a great place to hangout and potty it should not be used as puppy daycare or your pup will learn to turn it into a puppy circus of misery.

If your pup is going to be a housedog "the best kind of dog in my opinion", your most important purchase will be a small kennel that will be replaced as your puppy grows. If you are getting your pup by airplane the kennel it comes in will work for a while. If you do not want to purchase multiple kennels a cardboard box too tall for pup to jump out of will function for the first couple weeks.

Initially the kennel needs to be small enough so that if pup soils it he or she cannot escape its own mess. This trains the pup to hold it when in the kennel and trains you to quickly run your pup outside whenever you get them, both of which aid in house breaking.

As your pup grows and even after being house broke you should continue to have pup stay in the kennel for extended periods of time so that it becomes a safe and familiar place to stay and retreat into. Never use the kennel for punishment but instead use it to keep pup from being a nuisance when entertaining guests, at night to sleep, when you run to the store, go to work, or to escape into when he or she reaches sensory over load. A dog that is well conditioned to the kennel as a pup will be easily kennel broke later on and a better companion overall. If done right your pup should think of the kennel as “theirs” and retreat into it for safety, to rest, and eventually on command.

Before puppy arrives you should have talked with the breeder and have on hand a small amount of the same type chow the breeder is feeding. Most breeders provide a few days to a week’s worth of pups usual chow. It is not required to feed the same food as the breeder but it is easier on the pup’s digestive system to keep them on familiar chow for a few days after arriving and to gradually change to your preferred chow by mixing.

I would suggest purchasing a separate spill proof food and watering dish if you plan to feed on a schedule or a self feeder and self watering system if you plan to feed on demand. Get an adult sized food and water dish as your pup will quickly out grow anything designed for a puppy. We use a self feeding and watering system so our dogs can eat and drink whenever they like.

While feeding and watering on demand is convenient it deprives you of a trainable moment. Many successful trainers use feeding as a powerful training time so this decision should not be based on convenience alone. While feeding can be a training tool your pup should always have access to a supply of clean fresh water.

Before your puppy arrives you should purchase a small collar with your name, address and telephone number on it and a light leash. You will find the setup invaluable for taking your puppy out to do his or her business on the way home as well as other activities once you get home.

You should also schedule a trip to your local veterinarian in the first week or two for a complete physical and to make arrangements for the next set of booster shots, worming and anything else suggested by your local animal physician. While no puppy leaves our kennel without having a physical and all shots and worming up to date there is added reassurance and comfort when your own doctor affirms this. Additionally, your area of the country might have different laws and health concerns then North Dakota that should be addressed at this time or in the near future.

Having taken care of all this in advance will allow you plenty of uninterrupted free time to play with and enjoy the experience of a new puppy. As Gene Hill said “Whoever wrote you cannot buy happiness, forgot about little puppies”.