

Welcoming Your New Dog

Beth Bradley

Preparing for a new puppy or dog in your home involves much more than buying a leash, bowls, and food. You must also prepare to adjust your schedule, your attitude, and the physical environment of your house.

- Prepare your home to be a safe, healthy environment for a dog.
- Prepare yourself to be your dog's leader.
- Prepare your schedule by making time for exercise and play.

Your dog will be a part of your life for many years to come. Get off to a good start by welcoming your new puppy or dog in the right way.

The Easy Part

The easiest part of preparing to welcome your new dog is getting the right supplies.

Bowls I recommend stainless steel for easy cleaning. In addition, they are safer and more durable than other types of bowls for pups who might chew them.

Food Puppies and dogs have different nutritional needs at different ages. You should speak to your trainer or veterinarian to determine the best food for your new puppy or dog at different stages of his life.

Crate The crate should be just large enough for your dog to stand, turn around, and lay down comfortably. The crate must be small enough that the pup or dog will not eliminate in the space. It is very important to confine your new puppy or dog when you are not able to supervise him. Your dog's crate is a safety zone. Used properly, it will make your dog feel secure and will allow you to be sure that he is safe.

Bedding For chewing puppies, bedding can be a deadly hazard. Ingested bedding can cause painful and potentially fatal intestinal blockage. Do not give puppies bedding until they are past the chewing stage. If your new dog is an adult, do not give him bedding until you know whether he is a chewer or not.

Toys I recommend bully sticks, Nylabones, and other durable plastic toys for puppies. Soft plush toys too closely resemble other articles (such as pillows and slippers) that you do not want your new puppy or dog to chew. In addition, like bedding, plush toys have stuffing that can be ingested and cause serious, possibly fatal, health problems.

Leashes and collars The point of a collar and leash is to give you the means by which to safely and effectively control your dog's movement and, if necessary, correct him. There are many types of collars. Literally and figuratively, one size does NOT fit all. A collar that is appropriate for one dog is not necessarily appropriate for another. Your dog's size, temperament, and behavior will dictate which collar is most appropriate for him. Because of the importance of choosing the right collar and having the right fit, it is advisable to discuss your choice with a trainer.

Of course, the right supplies are only the beginning. You also need to prepare your home and schedule to accommodate your new puppy or dog.

Preparing Your Home to Be a Safe and Healthy Environment for Your Dog

Although I always tell people to avoid treating dogs like people, there is one way in which dogs can be compared to children. Just as adjustments are required to make a home “child safe,” your home may need some work to make it “puppy safe.” I intentionally do not use the term “puppy *proof*” because there’s no such thing! No matter how prepared you are, an unsupervised pup can always find trouble.

Crates vs. Gates The greatest safety measure you can take is to contain your pup when you cannot supervise him. I’m not quite sure why everyone is in a big hurry to let their puppy out of the crate to wander around the house or roam a certain room. Putting your dog in a crate is not a punishment. If properly introduced and used, the crate is a haven for your dog, especially when he is first getting to know the new environment of your home. Gating a puppy in a single room, such as the kitchen, is not the same as containing him in a crate. Leaving your pup gated in a room may protect some of your possessions, but it does not adequately protect your pup.

Puppies are immature until they are at least 18 months old. Unconfined, they will get into trouble in their efforts to self-entertain. They may do damage to your home or hurt themselves. You should not leave your dog uncontained and unsupervised until he is well over one year old; some dogs need confinement even longer. If you are welcoming a new adult dog, you should use the same approach as you would with a puppy until you know the dog and his habits well.

Toxic Substances Left to make their own choices, puppies and dogs will eat bugs, dead things, poop, and garbage. Clearly, they eat first and think later. Unfortunately, there are many things that can make your dog sick, even fatally so. Your common sense tells you that you should protect your dog from cleaning supplies, chemical agents, and other non-food items. However, there are a surprising number of actual food items, including grapes, raisins, chocolate, raw bread dough, onions, and garlic that can cause sickness or even death in dogs. For some foods, symptoms are almost immediately apparent. Other foods cause gradual damage, and symptoms may not be apparent for several days, by which time the situation will be urgent. Educate yourself about foods and substances that are toxic to dogs and keep the phone number for emergency veterinary care handy.

Escape Routes There are countless ways your dog can escape from the relative safety of your home or yard. He can slip through your legs as you open the door. He can break a window when you are not home. He can dig under or jump over fencing. He can knock gate latches loose.

- Be aware of where your puppy or dog is each and every time you open the door.
- Begin from day one to teach your puppy or new dog not to bolt through open doors.
- Don’t leave your new puppy or dog unattended outdoors—even if you have a fenced and gated yard.

The trouble with dog escapes is that you don’t know how your dog will do it until he has already done it. Crating your dog ensures that he won’t escape when you aren’t home and that he is not near the door when you are leaving or entering the house.

Chewing Hazards Puppies will chew almost anything—and they are not able to distinguish between things that are safe or harmful to chew. Even some adult dogs will chew things other than chew toys out of boredom, anxiety, or because they formed the habit before they came to you. You can take some steps to reduce the risk of inappropriate chewing.

- Secure loose wires that could tempt a puppy or dog to chew.
- Store your recycling bin and your trash well out of reach. Glass and metal containers can break or tear when chewed. Many dogs have seriously injured themselves because they did not stop chewing on broken glass or torn metal container with sharp edges.
- Do not give your new puppy or dog plush toys, bedding, or anything else that can be torn apart and eaten. Ingested materials and fibers can cause deadly obstructions in a dog's intestines.
- Keep your personal items, shoes, and clothing off the floor.
- Be alert to stealth chewing. If you can't see your puppy or dog, he is probably in the next room gnawing on a table leg or pulling the fringe out of the carpet.
- Give your puppy or dog a healthy and safe chew toy such as a bully stick or Nylabone.

Although puppies are the most intense chewers, almost all dogs like to chew. Most dogs mature and are able to limit their chewing to the chew toy you give them. However, until you are confident that your dog has outgrown indiscriminate chewing, do not leave him loose and unsupervised.

Miscellaneous Risks There are any number of seemingly harmless items in your home that can be dangerous to a puppy or dog. For example, a curious pup can get his head stuck in the handle of a shopping bag. As he tries to pull his head back, the bag moves, frightening him. The pup panics, and his struggles to escape only make the handle pull more tightly on his neck. Obviously, if the pup is alone, this scenario can have tragic results. This is just one example of the many kinds of unanticipated danger a pup can find if left loose and unsupervised, even in a small room

Getting your home ready for your new dog or puppy is just the beginning. You must also get yourself ready to have the right habits and attitudes. First and foremost, you must begin by recognizing your responsibility to be your dog's leader.

Preparing to Meet Your Dog's Need for Leadership

Your first instinct when you bring your new dog home will probably be to shower him with love and affection. In contrast, your dog's first instinct will be to figure out who in this new place he can rely on to guide and direct him. If he cannot identify a clear leader, he will start making his own decisions, which will only create stress for you both. It is tempting to treat the new pup or dog like a child—as if he were a human family member who just needs a little extra supervision. Unfortunately, humanizing your dog will only confuse him and make it more difficult for him to understand his role. The best thing you can do for your new dog is to quickly and clearly establish that you are the leader, that you will be making the decisions, and that he has a subordinate role in the home. Knowing that you are the leader will make your dog feel safe.

Your pup's mother began the training process, teaching him that he has a subordinate role and correcting him for challenging authority. She taught him that there are situations in which he must control his impulses and wait for direction. It is now your responsibility to resume training where his mother's training left off. If you have brought an adult dog into your home, you will still need to establish and maintain your leadership.

- The dog must stay off all furniture; this is a place of privilege for leaders. Your dog should not sleep in your bed; he should sleep in his crate or a bed on the floor.
- Feed the dog after the family has eaten. You may think that feeding him first will reduce his begging while you eat, but you will actually be exacerbating the problem. Feeding him first tells him he is the leader and has the right to demand food.
- Don't allow your dog to beg at the table or otherwise be a pest during meals. During your meal, put your dog in his crate, or in a down/stay at a distance from the table.
- Don't allow your dog to demand playtime, food, or attention by barking or pestering you until you do what he wants. As leader, you initiate playtime and interaction.
- Every privilege is earned. Treats, affection, even dinner should all be preceded by your dog responding to at least one command, even if it is as simple as a sit/stay. When you want to give him affection, call him to you rather than you going to him.
- Don't overdo the attention. When you talk to your dog, you should be giving him a command or praising obedience. Your dog will learn to associate the attention he desires with following your direction.
- Playtime is outdoors only. Inside the home is a place for quiet, calm behavior. If your dog tries to run around or is constantly pacing indoors (and if you are sure that you've met his needs to eliminate and exercise) place him in a down/stay command. Teach your dog that he must sometimes rest quietly and calmly.
- Take an obedience class to ensure that you are using the appropriate methods to teach your dog to understand and obey your commands. A professional trainer can also answer your questions about specific problems or issues.
- "Train" all the time. Dogs are happiest when there are no gray areas in their lives. Make sure your dog understands that "heel" is "heel" and "down" is "down" and failure to respond to any command is going to get the same correction every time.

Of course, very few dogs will be calm and obedient if they have not had sufficient exercise. If you expect your dog to behave calmly and quietly in the house, you must ensure you are meeting his exercise needs.

Preparing to Meet Your Dog's Exercise Needs

Exercise greatly enhances the odds that your dog will behave calmly, be tractable during training, and have fewer issues related to anxiety, stress, and aggression. In addition to reducing the amount of excess energy that can lead to behavior problems, exercise also affects dogs' mood and mental state. According to Tufts Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, exercise stimulates serotonin production, which helps stabilize your dog's mood, makes your dog more relaxed and content, and reduces anxiety and aggression. Finally, experience has shown me over and over again that a well-exercised dog is calmer and better behaved than a dog whose exercise needs are not being met.

There is no way around it, meeting your dog's need for exercise requires time! Letting your dog out to a fenced in yard is not a replacement for sustained activity with you. Make time in your daily schedule to provide the quantity and quality of exercise your dog needs.

Regular walks The walk is the most important exercise your puppy or dog needs. Being canines, dogs have an instinctive need to "travel." Ideally, a dog should trot for 2-3 miles during the course of the day. A quick jaunt down the block and back is insufficient exercise—especially if you must leave your dog alone during the day. Don't use your walks as potty breaks only. Instead, once your dog has done his business, continue with a sustained walk that keeps your dog trotting by your side. Do not allow your dog to stop and sniff at each and every bush and post. Rather, walk with your dog in proper heel position, maintaining a brisk pace that keeps your dog moving. Sustained walking with your new dog also teaches your dog to focus on you and to feel secure following your lead in unfamiliar situations and environments.

Treadmills Many dogs can be taught to walk or trot on a treadmill. While a treadmill is not a replacement for walking with you, it can work as an alternative on days when extenuating circumstances prevent you from taking a long outdoor walk. In addition, dogs with extremely high energy levels can benefit from some treadmill sessions to supplement your other walks. Treadmill walking also requires concentration, which allows your dog to burn some mental as well as physical energy.

Active play Play is not a replacement for walking, but it is necessary for your dog's well-being and can help burn additional energy. Throwing a ball for your dog to chase and bring back uses your dog's physical and mental energy. Throwing the ball repeatedly in quick succession can give your dog a sustained period of running. With a puppy or new dog, it is especially important that the majority of playtime involves interacting with you rather than with other dogs. Although you may eventually make use of a doggie day care, you should not delegate to others interaction with your dog during the early stages of his life with you. Use active playtime to teach your dog what is and is not acceptable when interacting with you and family members.

You may not reach the ideal goal of trotting 2-3 miles per day every day. Other guidelines suggest at least 30 minutes of sustained aerobic activity. The bottom line is that your dog needs to walk, trot, run, and have interactive play every day. When you are tempted to skimp on your dog's exercise, remember that a dog that does not get enough physical exercise and mental stimulation will expend his excess energy in ways

that run the gamut from annoying to destructive or even dangerous. Think of it this way: If you don't brush your dog, it isn't his fault when he sheds excess hair all over the house. If you don't exercise your dog, it isn't his fault when he "sheds" excess energy. Many behavior problems can be traced back to insufficient exercise. Save your own sanity by ensuring that your puppy or dog gets his exercise needs met.

Conclusion

You have made an enormous commitment welcoming a new dog or puppy into your home and you want to make him feel loved! Remember, though, that affection is the last of your dog's needs that he worries about. Your dog needs you, as "Pack Leader" to set boundaries, be consistent, and instill confidence, through assertive leadership, that you can protect him. He needs you to provide food, water, and physical and mental stimulation in the form of exercise. Of course you will show your dog affection, but to truly show your love you must make your dog feel safe and secure through strong leadership he can respect and believe in.

About Beth Bradley

As one of the top professional trainers and competitors in the United States, Beth is committed to improving the lives of dogs and people through training. She teaches group classes and private lessons in basic and advanced obedience, competition dog training, puppy training, Schutzhund training, personal protection, Canine Good Citizenship, and therapy dog training.

Beth also trains and places service dogs for children with autism and custom trains "cross-trained" companion/protection dogs for families and individuals. She consults for shelters in the tri-state area and for New Jersey law enforcement on cases involving canine behavior and temperament.

Beth began studying animal behavior and dog training at age twelve. She has worked and studied under many renowned animal behaviorists and trainers. After graduating from Rutgers University with a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and Criminal Justice, Beth worked as a New Jersey State Animal Control Officer. In 1989, she founded her own company and has made dog training and consulting her full-time career since 1995. Competing with her dogs, Beth has earned national and international titles, championships, and honors in both Schutzhund and AKC Obedience. In 2003 and 2009, she represented the United States in the FCI World Trials.

Beth is the author of *Real World Dog Training*, and has produced a number of training DVDs and videos. In addition, Beth trains and handles dogs for movies and television, with recent credits including *Board Walk Empire*, the *Batman* franchise, *Damages*, *Blue Bloods*, *The Good Wife*, and *The Blacklist*.

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