

Puppy Head Start

From seven to sixteen weeks of age pups learn “how to learn.” It is a very important time frame in the life of your pup. Use it wisely, remember puppies cannot learn anything locked in a crate or left in a dog run. Your pup should become part of your family and your life.

Early puppy training should be done in small doses with bits of food as rewards. I like to use pieces of cheese. Hold a small piece of cheese over his head and say sit. When he finally accidentally plops his butt down, say good and give him the piece of cheese. This can be done about 10 times in a row or until pup acts bored or distracted. Actually try to always stop a lesson before the pup gets bored. If you do this two or three times a day, your pup will know the work sit in a couple of days. At this point it is situational training. This means that the pup knows “sit” in this setting but does not really know the word thoroughly, such as if he were outside and you did not hold a reward over his head.

Teach “down” using the same principle. With pup in the sitting position, bring your hand to the floor in front of pup and say “down.” He will quickly learn to lie down to get at the treat in your hand give him praise and release the food reward. It is good for your pup to know the “down” command in order to later lie down quietly in a holding blind or duck blind. This command can also be used later if needed to steady the dog in stressful situations.

We suggest you have the pup wear a soft leather or nylon collar on their necks soon after they are separated from the litter. After a few days of scratching the collar, they adjust to having it on their neck. At this point snap a lightweight lead on the collar. Let the pup guide you at first. Do not drag or tug heavily at his neck at this time. Eventually try to guide the pup or coax him into following you with praise, tidbits and rewards. After several days, the pup should be readily walking on lead. Encourage him with praise and food to stay close to your side. Keep his attention. Take your pup off leash for walks in the woods or isolated parks. This will introduce him to various cover changes, footing, smells and sights. Have him wade thru puddles, navigate ditches and stairs. This also teaches him to follow you. Since he is in a strange place he is likely to want to stay close to the only thing that he is familiar with (you). This helps bonding and establishes you as the leader. Sometimes when your pup gets distracted, hide on him or change your position. When he discovers that you are gone, he will probably get a little worried and start whining or looking for something familiar. Now call and coax him to you and pet and praise him, this can help establish yourself as the leader and the puppy as the follower. You have become his leader and protector.

Have your pup fetch rolled up socks or small puppy bumpers (paint brush rollers make ideal puppy bumpers as they are soft, lightweight and easy to pickup). Once your pup likes to retrieve start hand tossing him “bumpers” and coax him to you. Kneel to his level clap, praise and move away from him if he hesitates to come. Most young pups will come when they think you are leaving them. If you have an independent pup, you might want to start his retrieves by using a hallway of your house with the doors closed. This will limit his options and you can reward him with treats for coming. Try using praise and excitement to get them to return with the bumpers before using treats. You can reward them with treats but he may decide to drop the bumper and run in without it for his treat. Don’t worry if this happens, at least he is obeying the “come” or “here” command. If he does not come, you may want to spend a few days on the “come” or “here” command, using treats as a reward before going back to retrieving.

Socialization is very important for puppies. This gets your pup out into the community where he can learn to interact with distractions and other dogs. Go visit several different places including some with high people traffic such as grocery stores. Simply set outside with the puppy and let them experience the noise and traffic with all the people in and out of the store.

If it is warm (water temperature over 50 degrees) pups can swim at an early age. The easiest way is to wade into the water and coax your pup in with you. Important, do not toss or drag the pup in let them enter on their own. If he won't go in, wait and try again later in a couple of days. Maybe try placing him and other dogs in and around the water. He will eventually swim, be patient. He may be 10 or 12 weeks old before he decides to venture in, don't worry and don't force the issue.

When your pup is retrieving your had tossed objects (normally 3 to 4 months of age) introduce a thrower to him. Use white or contrasting colored objects that he will see on cut grass or flooring if indoors. Have the thrower stand 10 or 15 feet away, ‘hup hup’ to get the pup’s attention and toss the object. Release the pup as soon as he wants to go. Only do 3 or 4 retrieves at a time, then put your pup away. Do this each day with short sessions. Always try to put them up wanting more.

Instead of trying to stretch the distance your pup goes on his retrieves, keep them short so as to not tire him out. Only gradually make the retrieves more complicated. Have a little change of over, run across a mowed path, angle a safe ditch or cross a large puddle of water (that he wont run around). Be innovative, you can put chairs out that he has to run past. Also try having a person stand short of another person who throws, so he runs past the first person on route to the object.

Try to get pup to run at the object and not at the thrower. Note if he is running at the thrower, then the thrower is too far away at this time, shorten the distance of the retrieve and lengthen the actual distance of the throw so the pup runs at the object and not the thrower.

At some point, a pistol shot can replace the 'hup hup'. It is not that important how you get the pup's attention. But you don't want to startle him with the noise of a gun. Our pups hear guns as soon as they go training with us. They are in our vehicles while we train the big dogs, so they hear the gun shots from a distance. Another way to introduce young pups to gun fire is to take them to the shooting range, keeping the in the truck at a safe distance to the loud gunfire, just enough so they hear the noise but not close enough that it startles them.

When dealing with your pup remember the three "S"
SHORT - SIMPLE - SUCCESSFUL