

Successful Late Placements

Puppies should always be ready for new homes.

By Carol Lea Benjamin

There's good news for dog breeders. Late-placed puppies *can* be raised in such a way that all the puppies--those that will ultimately be tested in the ring and those that must make a last-minute change in occupation from show dog to pet dog--will be able to go about their lives with equanimity, exhibiting none of the problems often associated with placements after the age of two months.

Ensuring Success

A program of super socialization, educating as well as socializing at the optimum age for puppies to learn, can result in success instead of failure. It simply means taking each of the appropriate and positive things you now do a thoughtful step further, having goals in mind appropriate for both show and pet puppies. After all, a confident attitude, comfort with change, a high stress threshold and a genuine ease with people of all types and ages are desirable qualities for the pet dog, and essentials for the show dog as well.

Do you ask adults and children to handle and pet each litter? Bravo! Now also ask them to work with your puppies. Having the puppies play "Follow the Leader" with both adults and children sets the stage for accepting leadership and training. Get extra mileage from each session by naming the activity and beginning the puppies' vocabulary list. Starting with seven- or eight week-old puppies, have your guest trainers cheerfully tell them, "Let's go," praising as the puppies follow.

Next introduce recall games, calling, "Puppy, puppy, come," to the group, then to each individual, teaching the recall *before* that psychological umbilical cord is gone forever. Your puppies will establish good habits before bad ones become entrenched.

This early "work" makes dogs more trainable, great for pets and show prospects alike. (Imagine the extra appeal of those puppies placed as pets at, say, six months of age who follow nicely and come when called.)

Are your puppies used to show leads? Great! Puppies kept beyond seven or eight weeks should also be trained to walk on a collar and leash. First get the puppies used to wearing flat puppy collars (never leave these on when you are not there to watch). Praise when you put each collar on. Next, since they are already following you around, add a light leash and praise as you go. Guests can join in, following puppies and encouraging puppies to follow them, all with a leash on.

The World On a String

Now for the most important part of this program: Once they can walk on a leash, the puppies must see the *world* on their "string," not just your backyard. Initially, if you are worried about the puppies being vulnerable to disease, carry them out, one or two at a time. (I carried my now 62-pound puppy around in my jacket when he was small, taking him everywhere I went. You can start the same way, the puppies taking turns going out with you. Even riding inside a jacket they see and hear the world away from home and I guarantee you, at that size, everyone will want to pet them.)

After it's safe to take the puppies out--and for many suburban and country puppies, taking walks can start prior to the last inoculation--walk them on leash. Take a different route each day. Take the puppies in the car and take your walk in a new place altogether. Take them visiting, too. Not all of your friends have white carpeting.

Many breeders take their puppies to match shows and feel that is sufficient to socialize the puppies to the world at large. Sorry. That is only a good part of a program. A match show, for all the commotion, does not have the random real-world sights and sounds a puppy needs, particularly if he might become someone's pet

later on. But what about your show puppies? I have seen many a gorgeous hunk fall apart at Westminster because of too narrow a socialization program. Your show puppy may never get to Westminster, but wouldn't you like to keep that option open?

Sniff, Honey, the World!

As long as you're outside, try this to help put all your dogs at ease with new things. Beginning at home, when the puppies are very small, add "Smell it" to their vocabulary list. Since sniffing is the first investigation any dog will try, this "command" takes two minutes to teach.

Offer a puppy five or six objects, each time saying, "Smell it, good puppy!" I have never seen a dog or puppy, (a) not smell an offered object; or, (b) not learn what "smell it" means almost immediately. Now you have a good tool for socializing your puppy to the world. As you take each little dog out and about, offer leaves, branches, stones, the letters you are about to mail, anything at all to let it investigate with its nose. Later, if anything spooks the puppy, pat the object and issue the command, "Smell it." Its nose will tell the puppy the overturned garbage can, open umbrella, shopping cart, bench at Westminster, or whatever, is inanimate and therefore harmless.

Object Lessons

You already give your puppies toys to tug and chew and wrestle over. Good. Now add obstacles to their environment, like tunnels or a board to climb on or crawl under. Make those puppies be problem-solvers. Make sure they get to walk on different surfaces: gravel, carpet, tile, concrete, grass. Most important, especially if they will quickly become too big to carry, teach them how to walk up and down stairs. You'd be surprised what a killer this is for many pet owners. Giving puppies a rich environment results in the sort of flexibility they need to move easily into another lifestyle, should that be their fate.

You probably crate train. After all, you need that for traveling with your puppies to shows. But do you house-train? If not, can you even imagine getting a six-month-old, 50-pound un-housetrained puppy? Or even a 20 pound one, a kennel *puppy* who actually learned the opposite of what a pet dog needs to learn? Whenever you *might* be selling a dog after the age of two months, you *must* begin to housetrain. Add "hurry up" to the vocabulary list. It focuses the pup and speeds the training.

A crate and a schedule will get the job done. Be sure that any puppy who *might* be placed as a pet becomes comfortable in the house and out of doors, blasé with the sound of traffic as well as the vacuum cleaner. Simply give each puppy play time indoors after he relieves himself outside.

A Caveat

The late-placed puppy who is not broadly socialized may appear perfectly normal to you. It is not until he leaves the comfortable environment of your home or kennel that the results of insufficient socialization show up. At that late date, there's little hope. But with thoughtful planning and goals that suit a variety of needs, you can raise puppies perfect for any heart's desire.

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