How to House-Train a Puppy (Step by Step for Beginners)

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A fully illustrated 27-step guide to house-training a puppy: set up the space, run a strict potty schedule, add a reliable cue, and handle setbacks without punishment.

Phase 1 — Set Up Before the Puppy Arrives

1. **Choose one consistent outdoor potty spot**
   Choose one consistent outdoor potty spot.
2. **Set up a crate as a safe den**
   Set up a crate as a safe den.
3. **Confine the puppy to easy-to-clean rooms**
   Confine the puppy to easy-to-clean rooms.
4. **Buy an enzymatic cleaner, not bleach**
   Buy an enzymatic cleaner, not bleach.
5. **Learn when puppies need to go**
   Learn when puppies need to go.
6. **Plan a break every two hours**
   Plan a break every two hours.
7. **Choose one short cue word**
   Choose one short cue word.

Phase 2 — Run a Strict Potty Routine

8. **Follow the schedule without skipping**
   Follow the schedule without skipping.
9. **Go to the same spot every trip**
   Go to the same spot every trip.
10. **Wait quietly for up to five minutes**
    Wait quietly for up to five minutes.
11. **Reward within three seconds of finishing**
    Reward within three seconds of finishing.
12. **Never punish or rub their nose in it**
    Never punish or rub their nose in it.
13. **Interrupt gently if you catch them mid-act**
    Interrupt gently if you catch them mid-act.
14. **Clean every accident with enzyme cleaner**
    Clean every accident with enzyme cleaner.
15. **Log each accident to find the pattern**
    Log each accident to find the pattern.

Phase 3 — Add Independence and a Reliable Cue

16. Say the cue word as they begin

Say the cue word as they begin.

17. Teach a bell at the door

Teach a bell at the door.

18. Watch for the signs before an accident

Watch for the signs before an accident.

19. Add 15 minutes each clean week

Add 15 minutes each clean week.

20. Grant more freedom only after a clean week

Grant more freedom only after a clean week.

21. Reward calm waiting at the door

Reward calm waiting at the door.

Phase 4 — Troubleshoot and Keep It Reliable

22. Rule out a medical cause first

Rule out a medical cause first.

23. Step back after any setback

Step back after any setback.

24. Keep the crate a positive place

Keep the crate a positive place.

25. Hold the schedule for a full month

Hold the schedule for a full month.

26. Fade treats into occasional praise

Fade treats into occasional praise.

27. Generalise slowly to new places

Generalise slowly to new places.

Sources

1. ASPCA — pet care and adoption
   https://www.aspca.org/
2. RSPCA — animal welfare advice
   https://www.rspca.org.uk/
3. WebMD — health information
   https://www.webmd.com/
4. MedlinePlus — NIH health information
   https://medlineplus.gov/

Written as a checklist from https://www.howcompass.com/how-to/How-to-House-Train-a-Puppy. Corrections: https://www.howcompass.com/cor