

Tips on Training a New Puppy

Life comes at a young puppy from all directions in its first year of life. It's fun and exciting, but sometimes intimidating as well. It is the most important time, and we will have to be careful, as we guide, expose, and monitor our new hunting partner. We hope to build on the positive and help them fully realize their instincts, while gaining a self-confidence and avoiding bad habits. We're also blending in the basics of obedience, so it is a real balancing act. For most of us, it is a very rewarding experience indeed when we see the training in our new puppy take hold and they awaken into a full blown hunting dog.

Where do we start? An overall perspective on our part should come first: understanding how important inherited characteristics are, how proper socialization fits in and which commands to build on first. A clear picture of our task will enable us to sort out the various aspects and see how each fits together as we proceed through the training sessions. When we imagine the dog itself as our foundation, it becomes evident how important a role selection of the puppy plays into a dog's future potential for overall success. Key attributes are a good nose, a keen discriminating sense of smell, a strong desire, an internal drive to continue working when the going gets tough, cooperation, a natural attentiveness to us plus the eager to please attitude, good coat and conformation, strength and endurance, a balanced temperament, all of which supports the self-confidence the dog will ultimately require to face the adverse and ever changing conditions that become common in a hunting environment.

With these foundation blocks in mind, we suggest you think of proper socialization as the mortar that bonds and holds the building blocks of hunting dog training into place as you build the puppy into a Gun Dog. It is possible to work on more than a single aspect of your puppy's development at any time. We can expose a young dog to the neighborhood while getting him used to walking on a lead. We can begin heel training while working the puppy around a car or a friend, and introduce travel at the same time. We can let our puppy run and explore the open fields while trailing a check cord to begin establishing control. Expanding our puppy's world step by step from the living room to the backyard, to the hunting field - socializing him with other dogs, introducing him to travel and dog crates, game birds, gunfire, all of these will come into play during the first year.

It would be foolish to expect the puppy to be attentive, able to focus or capable of learning the first time into the field, because there are just too many exciting things, unfamiliar things, and possibly even scary things, but in every case, distracting things. That is why it is critical to just let our puppy run and be exposed to the areas he or she will ultimately train and hunt in. It's helpful to take a few minutes and lay out a plan of exposure. Decide where your puppy is in the process of becoming acclimated to a hunting environment, what has and hasn't been covered yet, where you need to build more on and what your next steps should be. Keeping good notes is key to any training session. At the least, a set of notes that tells us what progress was made, where the next session of training could begin, and any concerns we have seen is going to make the training cycle from puppy to hunting dog easier for both us and our dogs. Fitting into all of this is the basic "good - Citizen" stuff of obedience commands "Here" and "Heel". The following are some other must - cover areas to prepare our youngster for serious training and field work.