

WALNUT CREEK SUPPLY

THE COMPLETE CARE GUIDE

Puppy

The first year: housetraining, socialization, teething and growing up healthy



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New owner? Go straight to Section 1. It is written so you can set up a safe, correct home and get through the first 48 hours without reading anything else first.

There is nothing quite like the first night a puppy is home. The house is suddenly full of tiny toenails on the floor, a warm little body that smells faintly of biscuits, and a creature who has just left the only family it has ever known and is now trusting you with everything. It is a joy, and it is also a lot of work. Puppies chew, cry, pee on the rug, and wake you at 5 a.m. with a face like pure sunshine. This guide is here to help you get through the hard parts with a clear head and a good sense of humor, so the next 12 to 24 months build the kind of bond you will treasure for the next decade or more.

This guide is about **puppyhood only**, from the day your puppy comes home at about 8 weeks until it is fully grown, which is roughly 12 months for small breeds and up to 18 to 24 months for large and giant ones. We also have a general Dog guide that covers adult-dog care across all life stages, and we will not repeat that material here. Here we stay focused on the things that matter most while your dog is small: housetraining, socialization, vaccines, teething, growth, and the first big lessons. One note before we start: your veterinarian knows your puppy, and we do not. Everything here is safe, general guidance. Where it touches on medical decisions, your vet has the final word.

SECTION 1

Quick Start: Your First 48 Hours

1. **Schedule the first vet visit before you bring your puppy home.** Most vets want to see a new puppy within the first few days. Call ahead, ask what paperwork from the breeder or shelter to bring (vaccination and deworming records), and book it. A puppy who is already sick, or who has not been checked, should not meet other dogs until your vet says it is safe.
2. **Pick one "puppy zone" and set it up before the car ride home.** Choose a small, easy-to-clean area near where you spend most of your time, such as a kitchen corner or a gated section of a hallway. Put the crate, a bed, water, and a few safe toys there. A small zone keeps a puppy from getting overwhelmed and makes housetraining much easier.
3. **Puppy-proof before arrival, not after the first chewed cord.** Get down on your hands and knees and look at the room at puppy height. Cords, shoes, houseplants, trash cans, and anything small enough to swallow all need to go up, out, or behind a gate. The next section walks through every room.
4. **Go straight to the potty spot when you arrive.** Before you carry your puppy inside, set it down in the spot you want it to use and wait quietly for a few minutes. When it goes, praise warmly and give a small treat right away. This is lesson one of housetraining.
5. **Start a schedule on day one.** Puppies thrive on predictability. Pick regular times for meals, potty trips, naps, and play, and write them down. A puppy who knows what comes next is calmer and learns faster.
6. **Keep the first day quiet.** Resist the urge to invite the whole neighborhood over. Your puppy has just left its mother and littermates, and it needs time to learn the sounds, smells, and people of a new home. Introduce family members one or two at a time, calmly and at the puppy's level.
7. **Plan the first night.** Place the crate within earshot of your bed, at least for the first few weeks. Take the puppy out to potty right before bed, expect to do at least one nighttime trip, and keep it boring: no play, no chatting, just out and back in. The Housetraining section has the full nighttime plan.
8. **Feed what the breeder or shelter was feeding.** Ask for a few days' supply and the feeding schedule. Switching food on top of the stress of a move is a recipe for an upset tummy. If you plan to change foods, do it gradually over 7 to 10 days, later on.
9. **Supervise every moment, or confine.** A puppy who is awake and loose in the house is either being watched or is in a crate, pen, or gated zone. That one rule prevents most accidents, chewed items, and emergency vet visits.
10. **Start handling gently from the first day.** Touch paws, ears, mouth, and tummy for a few seconds at a time while giving treats. This builds the tolerance your puppy will need for grooming, nail trims, and vet exams.

11. **Order an ID tag and ask your vet about a microchip.** Puppies slip through gates and out of doors faster than you would believe. A tag with your phone number should be on the collar from the first week.

First-Time Starter Bundle

What should be in the house on day one, and what to look for in each category.

Essentials

- **A crate sized for the adult dog, with a divider** — a wire or hard-sided crate large enough for the puppy to stand, turn around, and lie down when full grown. A divider lets you shrink the space now so it works as a den and not a bathroom.
- **A comfortable, washable bed or crate pad** — chew-resistant if your puppy is a chewer, and machine washable because accidents will happen.
- **A properly sized flat collar and an ID tag** — a lightweight adjustable collar that fits two fingers snugly beneath it, plus an engraved tag with your phone number. Check the fit weekly, because puppies grow fast.
- **A lightweight leash and a well-fitted harness** — a harness is gentler on a small puppy's neck while it learns to walk politely.
- **Stainless steel or ceramic food and water bowls** — heavy enough not to tip, easy to sanitize, and sized for your puppy's face.
- **A complete-and-balanced puppy food** — one labeled for growth, or for all life stages, with a statement from AAFCO (the Association of American Feed Control Officials) that it meets nutritional standards. For dogs expected to be 50 pounds or more as adults, look specifically for a large-breed puppy formula.
- **Training treats, soft and pea-sized** — tiny, low-calorie, easy-to-swallow treats for rewarding in seconds.
- **An enzymatic cleaner** — made for pet accidents. It breaks down the odor-causing proteins so your puppy is not drawn back to the same spot.
- **Baby gates or an exercise pen** — to create a safe zone and block stairs and off-limits rooms.
- **Waste bags and a washable potty-training pad, if you need one** — pads are a convenience for apartment living or very young puppies, but outdoors is the long-term goal.
- **A soft brush and puppy nail clippers or a grinder** — for early handling practice, even before there is much to trim.

Ready to set up? Browse the essentials in our collections: Dry Dog Food, Dog Harness, Collar & Tag and Dog Beds.

Enrichment

- **Safe chew toys in several textures** — firm rubber, soft rope, and a frozen-friendly option. Having variety helps you redirect biting to something appropriate.
- **Food puzzle toys and lick mats** — they turn mealtime into brain work, and they calm a puppy who is over-excited.
- **A few soft plush toys, sized so they cannot be swallowed** — fine for supervised cuddling, and not for chewing in the crate.
- **A tug toy, long enough to keep small hands and teeth apart** — for structured play with rules.
- **A snuggle toy or a worn T-shirt with your scent** — comfort for the first nights in the crate.
- **A small training pouch for treats** — keeps rewards close at hand so you can mark good behavior in the moment.
- **A secure car harness or crash-tested travel crate** — for the first trip home and every ride after.

Enrichment, one click away. Shop Dog Toys and Calming & Stress Relief Supplements.

SECTION 2

Meet Your Puppy

A puppy is, in the most literal sense, a baby. A dog at 8 weeks has a brain still wiring itself, a body that tires quickly, and an immune system that is not finished. The first year is when it learns what the world is, who is safe, and what you want from it. That makes puppyhood the most important teaching window of a dog's life, and also the one most worth enjoying.

What a normal puppy looks and acts like

Puppies **sleep 18 to 20 hours a day**. That is not laziness; it is how they grow. Expect a puppy to play hard for 20 to 40 minutes, then drop mid-step into a heap and sleep for an hour or two. An overtired puppy is a cranky puppy, and many "bad behavior" episodes in the evening are really just a baby who needs a nap.

Puppies also explore with their mouths, because they have no hands. They bite, mouth, and chew everything. They have short attention spans (a minute or two for a new lesson at first), they startle easily, and they bounce back fast when you stay calm.

Most puppies go home no earlier than about 8 weeks

Puppies learn a great deal from their mother and littermates in the first eight weeks: how hard is too hard to bite, how to read body language, how to settle. Responsible breeders and shelters generally do not send puppies to new homes before about 8 weeks. Be wary of anyone offering a much younger puppy, and ask your vet if you have questions about a specific age.

Growth depends on breed size

How long a puppy stays a puppy depends mostly on how big it will be. Smaller dogs finish growing sooner; larger dogs take much longer, and their bones and joints need extra care while they do.

Size group	Typical adult weight	Approximate age near adult size	What it means for you
Toy	Under about 10 lb	About 9 to 12 months	Fragile at first, prone to low blood sugar, tiny meals
Small	About 10 to 25 lb	About 9 to 12 months	Fast growth, then plenty of energy and a long adolescence
Medium	About 25 to 50 lb	About 12 to 15 months	A middle path, with a long goofy teenage phase
Large	About 50 to 100 lb	About 15 to 18 months, sometimes longer	Needs large-breed puppy food and careful, gradual exercise
Giant	Over about 100 lb	About 18 to 24 months	Slowest growth, greatest joint risk, and the biggest chewing power

These ranges are approximate, and individual dogs vary. A mixed-breed puppy's adult size can be hard to guess. Your vet can estimate it from paw size, growth curve, and parentage if known.

Puppy stages at a glance

The chart below describes the big picture by age. It is a guide, not a deadline: some puppies hit milestones early and some late, and breed size changes the pace. We do not give exact weights here because puppies vary so much; your vet will weigh your puppy at each visit and tell you if the curve looks right. In general, a healthy puppy gains weight steadily and quickly early on, then more slowly as it approaches adult size.

Age	Weight trend	Meals per day	Milestones
8 to 10 weeks	Rapid, steady gain	3 to 4	Arrives home; first vet visit; learning name, crate, and potty spot
10 to 12 weeks	Rapid, steady gain	3 to 4	Vaccine series continues; socialization window is wide open; starts sleeping longer at night
3 to 4 months	Still fast	3 (some 3 to 4 for toy breeds)	Vaccine series wraps up near 16 weeks; baby teeth begin to loosen
4 to 6 months	Fast, then slowing	3, moving to 2 by around 6 months	Adult teeth erupt; chewing peaks; adolescence begins
6 to 9 months	Slower gain	2	Adult teeth in place; teenage independence; fear periods possible
9 to 12 months	Slow gain; small breeds near adult size	2	Small breeds reach adult size; training is tested hard
12 to 24 months	Gradual; large and giant breeds fill out	2	Large and giant breeds finish growing; social maturity develops

Meal counts are typical, and your vet may adjust them. Toy and small breeds may do better with more frequent small meals for longer.

SECTION 3

Puppy-Proofing & Home Setup

Puppy-proofing is a lot like baby-proofing, with a twist: puppies can reach farther, chew harder, and eat things babies would never touch. Take 30 minutes before your puppy comes home, get down on your hands and knees, and look at every room from a puppy's point of view.

Room-by-room check

Area	Common hazards	What to do
Kitchen	Trash cans, food on counters, cleaning supplies, low cabinets, dropped grapes, onions, or chocolate	Use a lidded or cabinet-stored trash can; childproof latches on low cabinets; keep counters clear
Living room	Electrical cords, remote controls, shoes, houseplants, small decor, candles	Tuck cords behind furniture or use cord covers; move plants to high shelves; keep small items off the floor
Bedrooms	Socks, underwear, jewelry, medications, hair ties	Keep closets closed; store medications in closed cabinets; use a hamper with a lid
Bathroom	Medications, razors, cleaning products, toilet cleaner tablets, trash	Keep the door shut; secure the lid on the toilet if you use cleaning tablets
Garage and basement	Antifreeze, chemicals, rodent poison, tools, fertilizer	Keep puppies out entirely; store products on high shelves in sealed containers
Yard	Gaps in fencing, toxic plants, pools, compost, garden products, hot surfaces	Walk the fence line for gaps; supervise every minute; keep garden products and compost out of reach
Stairs	Falls	Use a gate at the top and bottom; carry small puppies up and down

A note on **antifreeze**: it is sweet-tasting and deadly, and even a small amount can be an emergency. Clean up spills immediately and call a vet or poison hotline right away if you suspect a puppy has had any.

Plants and household items to watch

Many common houseplants and garden plants can make a puppy sick. If you are not sure whether a plant is safe, move it out of reach and check with your vet or the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center at **(888) 426-4435** (a consultation fee may apply). Medications are another leading cause of poisoning: ibuprofen, acetaminophen, and many human prescriptions are dangerous to dogs, so keep all pills in closed cabinets and never give a puppy human medication unless your vet says to.

Setting up the puppy zone

Pick a small area with an easy-clean floor and a gate or exercise pen. Put the crate (with its divider set so there is only enough room to stand, turn, and lie down), the water bowl, and a couple of safe chew toys inside. Let the puppy come and go from the zone when you are home and watching, and close the crate door for naps and when you cannot supervise.

Safety rules that matter most

- **Never leave a puppy unsupervised with small children.** Even the gentlest puppy can nip, and even the gentlest child can squeeze, drop, or startle a puppy. Teach kids to sit on the floor and pet gently, and always keep an adult within arm's reach.
- **Keep cords and chargers unplugged or covered.** Chewing a live cord is dangerous.

- **Watch for heat and cold.** Puppies cannot regulate their body temperature as well as adults do. Keep them in shade with fresh water on warm days, and bring them in when it is cold. Small and short-haired puppies chill fast.
- **Test pavement with the back of your hand.** If it is too hot for your hand to stay on for five seconds, it is too hot for paws.
- **Never leave a puppy in a parked car.** Temperatures inside a car climb to dangerous levels within minutes, even on mild days with the windows cracked.
- **Secure puppies in the car.** A crash-tested crate or a car harness attached to a seat belt keeps your puppy and your passengers safer than a loose lap.

SECTION 4

Housetraining & Crate Training

Housetraining is not about teaching a puppy to "be good." It is about giving a baby with a very small bladder frequent chances to go in the right place, and rewarding it every time it does. Patience and consistency beat everything else. Most puppies have mostly reliable habits in a few months, though full reliability can take longer, and small breeds often take more time.

The golden rules

1. **Take the puppy out often.** Always after waking up, after eating, after drinking, and after play. A young puppy may need to go every 1 to 2 hours while awake.
2. **Go to the same spot every time.** The smell tells the puppy what this place is for. Use a calm cue word such as "go potty" as it starts to go.
3. **Reward immediately.** The moment the puppy finishes, praise warmly and give a small treat. Within seconds, not after you walk back inside.
4. **Stay with the puppy outside.** If you let it out alone, you cannot reward it, and you will not know whether it went.
5. **Supervise indoors, or confine.** A puppy who is loose and unwatched will have an accident. Use a leash tether, a gate, a pen, or a crate.
6. **Learn the signs.** Sniffing the floor, circling, whining, heading toward the door, or suddenly stopping play are all "I have to go" signals.
7. **Never punish accidents.** See below.

How long can a puppy wait?

A rough, approximate rule of thumb: a puppy can hold its bladder for about **its age in months plus one, in hours**. A 2-month-old puppy might last 3 hours, a 3-month-old about 4 hours, and so on. This is a ceiling for daytime, not a goal; most young puppies need to go out sooner, especially after play or a meal. Individual puppies and small breeds vary, and a puppy who is drinking a lot, playing hard, or excited will need to go sooner. Overnight, puppies sleep longer than the formula suggests, but very young ones may still need one or two trips.

Puppy age	Approximate maximum daytime wait	Typical daytime routine
8 to 10 weeks	About 2 to 3 hours	Out every 1 to 2 hours while awake
3 months	About 3 to 4 hours	Out every 2 hours while awake
4 months	About 4 to 5 hours	Out every 2 to 3 hours while awake
5 to 6 months	About 5 to 6 hours	Out every 3 to 4 hours
6 months and up	About 6 to 8 hours at most	Regular schedule, with reliable habits

When accidents happen

Accidents are information, not misbehavior. If you catch your puppy in the act, calmly interrupt with a cheerful "oops," carry it outside, and reward it if it finishes there. If you find the accident later, say nothing and clean it up. Puppies cannot connect a scolding to something that happened minutes ago, and punishment (including rubbing a nose in it) teaches only that you are scary, which can lead to puppies hiding to potty.

Clean every accident with an **enzymatic cleaner**, which breaks down the odor compounds in urine that regular cleaners leave behind. If the smell remains, the puppy will go there again. Avoid ammonia-based cleaners, which smell like urine to a dog.

Crate training basics

A crate is a safe den, not a jail. Dogs naturally avoid soiling where they sleep, which makes a correctly sized crate a powerful housetraining tool.

- **Size it right.** Large enough to stand, turn around, and lie down comfortably, and not much bigger. If it is too large, use the divider so the puppy cannot use one end as a bathroom.
- **Make it wonderful.** Toss treats in, feed meals inside, and give special chews only in the crate. Leave the door open at first.
- **Build up slowly.** Close the door for a few seconds while the puppy eats a treat, then a minute, then longer. Stay close at first and build duration gradually.
- **Never use the crate as punishment.**
- **Do not leave a puppy crated longer than it can hold its bladder.** Long days of crating are not fair to young puppies. If you work long hours, arrange for a midday visit from a friend or a pet sitter.
- **Exercise first.** A puppy who has played and pottied is much more likely to settle.

The nighttime plan

1. Pick up the water bowl about an hour or two before bedtime, so the puppy is not drinking right up to lights out. Check with your vet if you are concerned about hydration, and never restrict water in hot weather.
2. Take the puppy out for a final potty trip right before bed.
3. Put the puppy in the crate near your bed, so it can hear and smell you.
4. If the puppy wakes and cries in the night, wait a moment to see whether it settles. If it keeps crying or if it has been several hours, take it out quietly and calmly. No play, no chatter. Straight to the potty spot, praise, and back to the crate.
5. Expect one or two night trips for the first weeks. Most puppies sleep through the night by around 4 to 5 months, but it varies.
6. Cover three sides of a wire crate with a light blanket to make it cozier, as long as the puppy cannot pull the fabric in and chew it.

If crying is intense and does not ease, see the Common Challenges section.

SECTION 5

Growth, Vaccines & Health Milestones

Your veterinarian directs all vaccines, parasite prevention, and timing. What follows is the typical pattern so you know what to expect and what questions to ask. Protocols differ by region, risk, and the individual puppy.

The first vet visit

Plan to see your vet **within the first few days** of bringing your puppy home. Bring any records from the breeder or shelter, a fresh stool sample if you can, and a list of questions. The vet will weigh the puppy, check its heart, lungs, eyes, ears, teeth, and joints, and talk about vaccines, parasite prevention, feeding, and when to spay or neuter.

Typical vaccine and prevention timeline

Because the antibodies a puppy gets from its mother fade at unpredictable times, puppies receive vaccines in a **series of several visits**, usually spaced a few weeks apart, through about 16 weeks of age. Your vet will build the exact schedule.

Typical timing	What your vet may do	Notes
First visit (about 6 to 8 weeks)	Exam, first distemper and parvovirus combination vaccine, deworming	Records from the breeder are very helpful
About 10 to 12 weeks	Second combination vaccine, possible additional vaccines based on risk	Your vet may recommend other vaccines depending on where you live and your lifestyle
About 14 to 16 weeks	Final combination vaccine in the series	The series generally finishes around 16 weeks
About 12 to 16 weeks	Rabies vaccine, as required by law	Timing and requirements vary by state and local law
From early on	Heartworm prevention and flea and tick prevention	Your vet picks a product that is safe for your puppy's age and weight
About 1 year	Booster visit	Your vet will explain the long-term plan

Core vaccines are those recommended for all puppies. They protect against serious diseases, including distemper and parvovirus, which are combined in a single series, and rabies, which is required by law in most places. **Non-core vaccines** (such as those for kennel cough or Lyme disease) depend on your puppy's risk, and your vet will help you decide.

Parasite care

- **Deworming.** Puppies commonly carry intestinal worms (roundworms and hookworms, for example), sometimes passed from the mother. Vets usually deworm puppies at several visits and check stool samples. Worms can spread to people, so wash hands and pick up waste promptly.
- **Heartworm prevention.** Heartworm is spread by mosquitoes and can be deadly. Prevention is usually started early and given monthly, as directed by your vet. Never skip it.
- **Flea and tick prevention.** Many products are only safe above a certain age or weight, and some are dangerous for puppies or for other pets in the home. Ask your vet to choose one.

Parvovirus: know the warning signs

Parvovirus ("parvo") is a highly contagious and dangerous virus that attacks the gut. Puppies who have not completed their vaccine series are the most at risk. The virus can survive in the environment for a long time, on soil, grass, shoes, and paws.

Warning signs include: sudden lethargy, loss of appetite, vomiting, severe or bloody diarrhea with a distinct foul smell, fever, and rapid dehydration.

Treat this as an emergency. If your puppy has these signs, call your vet or emergency clinic right away, tell them you suspect parvovirus so they can prepare to isolate your puppy, and do not wait to see if it passes. Early treatment makes a significant difference.

The balance between socialization and vaccines

Here is the tough one. The prime window for socialization closes at around 14 to 16 weeks, but the vaccine series is not complete until about the same time. Waiting until all shots are done means missing a vital period; going everywhere before then risks disease. **Your vet will advise which places are safe where you live.** In general:

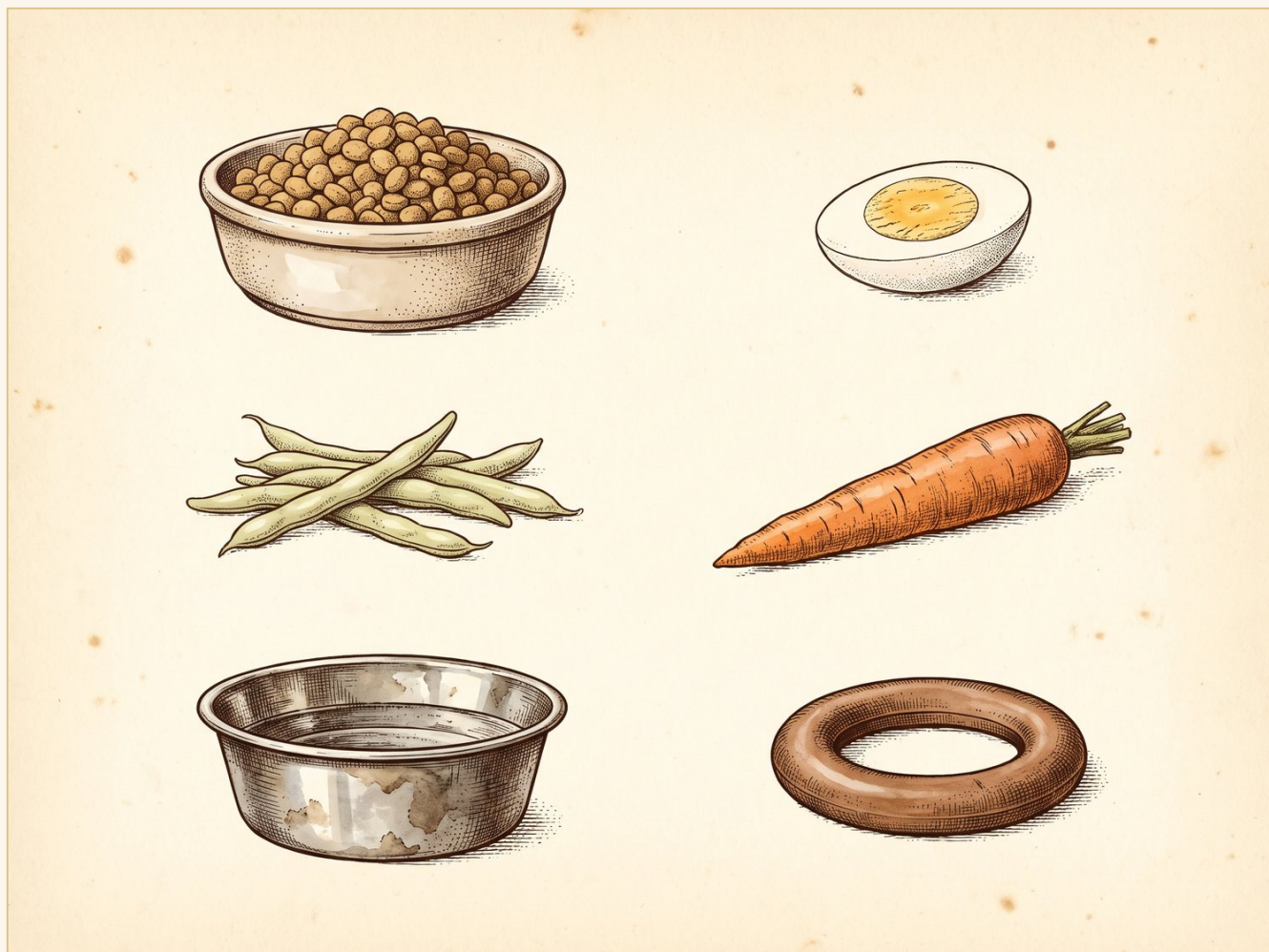
- Safer: puppy classes that require proof of vaccination and are run on cleaned surfaces, and private homes with healthy, fully vaccinated dogs you know.
- Use caution: dog parks, pet store floors, public sidewalks heavily used by other dogs, and areas where unfamiliar dogs have relieved themselves.
- Safer socialization without paws on the ground: carry your puppy to see traffic, bicycles, new people, and the sounds of town, or sit with it in a wagon or on a blanket in a quiet outdoor area.

Other milestones to plan for

- **Spay or neuter.** Timing is a veterinary decision that varies by breed size and health. Some vets recommend earlier for small dogs and later for large and giant breeds, whose growth may be affected. Talk it over with your vet.
- **Microchip and ID tag.** A microchip is a permanent form of ID. Register the chip and keep the contact information current. A tag on the collar is still your first line of defense.
- **Licensing.** Many places require dog licenses. In Pennsylvania, for example, dogs 3 months or older must generally be licensed each year by January 1. Rules vary, so check your own state, county, and local requirements.
- **Pet insurance or an emergency fund.** Puppies can have expensive emergencies. Think about it before you need it.

SECTION 6

Diet & Nutrition



A complete puppy food in measured meals is the base. Small, healthy extras are fine as training rewards, and a few common foods are genuinely dangerous.

A growing puppy needs more calories per pound than an adult, plus precisely balanced protein, fat, calcium, and phosphorus. The easiest, safest way to deliver all of this is a **complete-and-balanced puppy food**. Our rule at Walnut Creek Supply is the same one we follow at home: **clean fuel, no junk**, and no mystery ingredients.

Choosing a puppy food

- **Look for the AAFCO statement.** The label should say the food is complete and balanced for **growth** (or for all life stages), based on feeding trials or a nutrient profile. This is the single most important line on the bag.
- **Read the ingredient list.** Real, named protein sources near the top are a good sign. Vague terms and long lists of fillers are not.
- **Match the food to your puppy's expected adult size.** Toy and small breeds do well on small-breed puppy formulas with smaller kibble. Large breeds need something different (see below).
- **Ask your vet.** Your vet may have a preferred diet based on your puppy's health and breed.

Large-breed puppies need a different food

Dogs expected to weigh **50 pounds or more as adults** should eat a **large-breed puppy formula**. These foods have **controlled calcium and calories** so the puppy grows steadily rather than too fast. Growing too fast can contribute to developmental bone and joint problems in large breeds. Two tips:

- **Do not add calcium supplements** to a complete puppy food. Too much calcium is as risky as too little for large-breed puppies.
- **Keep your puppy lean.** You should be able to feel (but not see) the ribs, and see a waist from above. Extra weight is hard on growing joints.

Toy breeds and low blood sugar

Very small puppies have little energy reserve. If they miss a meal, they can develop **hypoglycemia** (low blood sugar), which causes weakness, wobbling, trembling, or collapse. Feed toy-breed puppies small, frequent, regular meals, never skip one, and call your vet right away if you see these signs. Your vet may suggest what to have on hand for emergencies.

How much and how often

Age	Meals per day	Notes
8 to 12 weeks	3 to 4	Small portions at regular times; toy breeds stay on the higher end
3 to 6 months	3	Many puppies move to 3 meals around 12 to 16 weeks
About 6 months and up	2	Most puppies move to 2 meals a day by about 6 months

Follow the feeding guide on the bag as a starting point, then adjust to your puppy's body condition, with your vet's guidance. **Measure meals** with a real measuring cup and not by eyeballing. Free-feeding (leaving food out all day) makes housetraining harder and weight harder to track. Give your puppy about 15 to 20 minutes to eat, then pick up the bowl.

Treats, extras, and table food

- Keep **treats under about 10% of daily calories**. Training treats should be tiny, the size of a pea or smaller.
- Count treats and chews in the daily total, and reduce meals a bit on heavy training days.
- A few plain, safe extras such as cooked egg, plain green beans, or carrot pieces can make good low-calorie rewards. Introduce each one slowly.
- Avoid feeding from the table. It teaches begging, and many human foods are unsafe.

Changing foods

If you need to switch foods, go gradually over **7 to 10 days**. Start with about a quarter of the new food mixed with three quarters of the old, then move to half and half, then three quarters new, then all new. If the stool gets soft or your puppy vomits, slow down.

Water

Fresh, clean water should always be available, except for the pre-bedtime break in the housetraining plan. Wash bowls daily.

Foods that are toxic to dogs

If your puppy eats any of these, call your vet, the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center at **(888) 426-4435**, or the Pet Poison Helpline at **(855) 764-7661** right away. A consultation fee may apply, and it is worth it.

Food	Why it is dangerous	What to do
Xylitol (a sweetener in sugar-free gum, candy, some baked goods, and some peanut butters)	Can cause a rapid drop in blood sugar and liver damage, even in small amounts	Emergency: call right away
Chocolate (especially dark and baking chocolate)	Contains compounds toxic to dogs; effects vary with the amount and type	Call a vet or poison line promptly
Grapes and raisins	Can cause kidney failure in some dogs	Call a vet promptly
Onions and garlic	Can damage red blood cells	Call a vet; avoid in all forms
Macadamia nuts	Can cause weakness, vomiting, and tremors	Call a vet
Alcohol and raw yeast dough	Alcohol is toxic; rising dough can expand in the stomach	Emergency: call right away
Cooked bones	Can splinter and puncture the gut or block it	Call a vet if swallowed

***Shop the food and supplies:** Browse Dry Dog Food and Dog Wet Food.*

SECTION 7

Socialization & Training

The socialization window

The **sensitive period for socialization** runs roughly from **3 to 14 to 16 weeks** of age. During these weeks, puppies are more open to new things, and what they experience gently and positively shapes how they feel about the world as adults. Do not worry if you got your puppy at 8 weeks; you still have weeks to work with. Socialization continues through adolescence, so keep going after the window narrows.

- **Keep it gentle and positive.** The goal is "that was fine, and even fun," not exposure at any cost. If your puppy freezes, tucks its tail, or tries to hide, add distance and make it easier.
- **Go slow and pair new things with treats.** New people, hats, umbrellas, uniforms, kids, strollers, vacuum cleaners, car rides, and different floor surfaces all count.
- **Meet calm dogs.** Healthy, fully vaccinated, friendly adult dogs are the best teachers. Avoid overwhelming or rough play.
- **Short and sweet.** Several brief, positive experiences a day beat one long outing.
- **Check with your vet** about where it is safe to go before the vaccine series is done.

Positive reinforcement only

Reward what you like, and puppies will repeat it. Use small treats, praise, and play. Do not use physical corrections, yelling, or intimidation; these can make a puppy fearful and can damage trust. If a puppy does something you do not like, redirect it to something it can do, and reward that.

Keep training sessions **short**, about 3 to 5 minutes for young puppies, a few times a day. End on a success. A tired or overexcited puppy is not ready to learn.

Bite inhibition and mouthing

Puppies learn how hard is too hard from littermates, who yelp and stop playing when bitten too hard. You can continue that lesson. When teeth touch skin, calmly say "ouch," stop the game, and withdraw your attention for a few seconds. Then offer an appropriate toy and praise when the puppy takes it. Over weeks, the goal is a soft mouth, then no teeth on skin. Never hit or hold a puppy's mouth shut.

Basic skills to teach in the first months

Skill	How to start	Tips
Name	Say the name in a happy voice; when the puppy looks at you, mark and treat	Never use the name for scolding
Sit	Lure a treat over the nose so the bottom drops; mark and reward	Practice before meals and at doors
Down	From a sit, lure the treat toward the floor between the paws	Be patient; some puppies take time
Come	Run backward, call happily, reward generously when the puppy arrives	Never call your puppy to punish it
Leash walking	Let the puppy wear a light leash indoors, then reward steps beside you	Stop when the leash goes tight; move on when it relaxes

Skill	How to start	Tips
Handling and grooming	Touch paws, ears, mouth, and tail briefly; reward calm acceptance	Practice daily, and add a soft brush and nail trims
Settle	Reward the puppy for lying down calmly on a mat or bed	Great for restaurants, visitors, and quiet time

Handling tolerance deserves its own mention. A puppy who learns to accept touch and gentle restraint will be easier for you, the groomer, and the vet for the rest of its life.

Classes

A good puppy class, one that requires proof of vaccination, uses positive methods, and keeps groups small, teaches skills and gives safe social time. Ask to watch a class before you sign up. Look for calm instructors, short sessions, and no harsh tools.

SECTION 8

Teething, Chewing & Play

The timeline

Puppies are born without teeth. Baby teeth start to come in at about 2 to 4 weeks, and by about 8 weeks most puppies have all **28 baby teeth**. Between roughly **3 and 7 months**, those teeth loosen and fall out (you may find tiny ones on the floor, or never see them, because puppies often swallow them harmlessly), and **42 adult teeth** come in, usually complete by about 6 to 7 months. Gums are sore during this time, which is why chewing peaks. Ask your vet to check that no baby teeth are being retained when adult teeth come in alongside them.

Chew safety

Chewing is normal and necessary. The goal is to give your puppy plenty of safe things to chew so it leaves your shoes alone.

Chew category	Good for	What to watch
Firm rubber toys	Everyday chewing; can be stuffed with food	Choose a size too large to swallow; replace when cracked
Soft or rope toys	Gentle play and tug	Supervise; remove frayed pieces, since swallowed strings can block the gut
Frozen toys or damp frozen washcloths	Sore gums during teething	Supervised only; cold and soft, not rock hard
Food puzzles and lick mats	Mental work and calming	Count the food in the daily total
Edible chews labeled for puppies	Short, supervised sessions	Pick a digestible one, and take it away when it gets small

Avoid hard items that can break teeth, such as real bones, antlers, hooves, and hard plastic or nylon that does not give slightly under a thumbnail. Avoid **cooked bones** entirely, and anything small enough to swallow or break into sharp pieces. A good rule: if you cannot dent it slightly with a fingernail, it may be too hard. Take away any toy that is breaking apart.

Play

- **Play several short rounds a day.** Puppies tire quickly, and overtired puppies get mouthy.
- **Be careful with large and giant breeds.** Avoid repetitive jumping, long runs, and slippery floors while the growth plates are open. Your vet can tell you what level of exercise suits your puppy at each age.
- **Teach rules in tug and fetch.** Pause the game when teeth touch skin, and ask for a sit before restarting.
- **Rotate toys.** Fewer toys out at a time stay interesting longer.
- **Mind the sun and the pavement.** Heat and exercise do not mix; cool, shady play is best.

SECTION 9

Common Challenges & Solutions

Every puppy has a bad week. Here is what you will probably see, and what to do about it. Individual puppies and situations vary, and when in doubt, call your vet.

Biting and mouthing

What you see: Sharp teeth on hands, ankles, and clothes, especially when excited or tired. **Why it happens:** Puppies explore with their mouths and are teething. **What to do:** Redirect to a toy, pause play when teeth touch skin, and make sure naps happen. Reward gentle behavior. **When to call:** Ask a trainer or vet if biting is intense, comes with growling or stiffness, or is aimed at guarding food or toys.

Nighttime crying

What you see: Whining or barking in the crate after bedtime. **Why it happens:** The puppy is lonely, needs to go out, or is simply adjusting. **What to do:** Do a final potty trip, keep the crate near you, and give a comfort item. Take the puppy out calmly if it has been several hours or it is clearly restless, then back to bed. **When to call:** If crying is nonstop for days, or if the puppy seems ill or in pain.

Accidents in the house

What you see: Puddles and piles on the floor. **Why it happens:** Small bladders, a missed cue, or too much freedom. **What to do:** Tighten the schedule, supervise closely, clean with an enzymatic cleaner, and reward outdoor success. Never punish. **When to call:** If a previously reliable puppy suddenly has frequent accidents, strains, or drinks much more than usual, as it could be a urinary tract infection or other issue.

Chewing the wrong things

What you see: Shoes, furniture, and cords being chewed. **Why it happens:** Teething and boredom. **What to do:** Puppy-proof, supervise, offer approved chews, and trade, never chase, when the puppy has something forbidden. **When to call:** If the puppy swallows anything it should not (see below).

Diarrhea and loose stool

What you see: Soft or watery stool. **Why it happens:** Food changes, stress, parasites, a dietary indiscretion (eating something it should not), or illness. **What to do:** Keep water available, avoid new foods and treats, and call your vet for guidance, since puppies dehydrate quickly. **When to call:** The same day if there is blood, vomiting, lethargy, loss of appetite, or if it lasts more than a day. Treat bloody diarrhea in a young puppy as a possible parvovirus emergency.

Swallowed objects

What you see: Missing socks, toy pieces, or a puppy who is vomiting, drooling, gagging, painfully hunched, or not eating or pooping. **Why it happens:** Puppies taste everything. **What to do:** Call your vet right away if you know or suspect something was swallowed. Do not induce vomiting unless a vet or poison line tells you to. **When to call:** Immediately. A blockage can be an emergency.

Kennel cough

What you see: A honking, hacking cough, sometimes ending in a gag. **Why it happens:** A contagious respiratory illness spread where dogs gather. **What to do:** Keep the puppy away from other dogs and call your vet. **When to call:** Soon, and right away if there is labored breathing, fever, lethargy, or loss of appetite, since puppies can get serious complications.

Fleas and ticks

What you see: Scratching, tiny dark specks in the coat, or a small bump attached to the skin. **Why it happens:** Outdoor exposure, especially in warm months. **What to do:** Use only a vet-chosen preventive that is safe for your puppy's age and weight, and check the coat after outdoor time. **When to call:** For heavy infestations (fleas can cause anemia in small puppies), for a tick you cannot remove, or any redness and swelling.

Separation distress

What you see: Barking, pacing, drooling, destruction, or accidents when left alone. **Why it happens:** Puppies are social and haven't learned that you come back. **What to do:** Practice short, calm departures that build up gradually. Skip dramatic goodbyes and greetings, give a puzzle toy, and exercise first. **When to call:** If distress is severe, or the puppy hurts itself or is not improving after several weeks; ask your vet or a trainer for help.

Fear periods

What you see: A normally bold puppy suddenly startles at things it used to ignore. **Why it happens:** Puppies go through developmental phases of heightened caution, often during adolescence. **What to do:** Stay calm, don't force it, keep distance, and let the puppy approach at its own pace with treats. **When to call:** If fear is extreme, lasting, or leads to aggression.

Jumping up

What you see: Paws on legs, chests, and guests. **Why it happens:** Puppies greet faces, and jumping gets attention. **What to do:** Turn away, wait for four paws on the floor, then reward. Ask visitors to do the same, and teach "sit" for greetings. **When to call:** Rarely; a trainer can help if it persists.

Leash pulling

What you see: A puppy who drags you down the street. **Why it happens:** It's exciting out there, and pulling works. **What to do:** Stop moving when the leash tightens, then reward when it loosens. Keep walks short and treat-rich, and practice in quiet places first. **When to call:** If your puppy coughs and gags, or you cannot manage a large puppy, ask a trainer.

Car sickness

What you see: Drooling, lip licking, whining, or vomiting on rides. **Why it happens:** Immature balance systems and nerves. **What to do:** Start with short trips to fun places, secure the puppy facing forward, keep the car cool and well ventilated, and ask your vet before a long drive. **When to call:** If it does not improve with age, your vet has options to discuss.

Quick reference

What you see	Likely cause	What to do	Vet urgency
Bloody diarrhea, vomiting, lethargy	Possible parvovirus or serious illness	Call a vet or emergency clinic now	Emergency
Suspected swallowed object	Curious chewing	Call your vet; do not induce vomiting unless told	Same day
Honking cough	Kennel cough	Isolate and call a vet	Within a day
Loose stool, otherwise bright	Diet change, stress, mild upset	Keep water up, bland routine, call your vet	If it lasts over a day
Heavy scratching or ticks	Fleas or ticks	Vet-chosen preventive	Within days
Sudden accidents in a trained puppy	Possible urinary infection	Call your vet	Within a day or two

SECTION 10

Routine Care Calendar

How often	What to do
Daily	Feed measured meals at regular times and refresh clean water
Daily	Take the puppy out after waking, eating, drinking, and play, and reward every success
Daily	Run two or three short training sessions and a few minutes of handling practice
Daily	Check the stool, appetite, energy, and eyes for anything unusual
Daily	Supervise or confine, and offer safe chews and a nap schedule
Weekly	Wash bowls, bedding, and toys; check toys for damage
Weekly	Brush the coat, look in the ears, and check paws and between toes
Weekly	Practice a new social experience that is positive and gentle
Weekly	Check the collar and harness fit, because puppies outgrow them fast
Monthly	Give heartworm and flea and tick prevention as directed by your vet
Monthly	Trim nails or practice the clipper or grinder routine
Monthly	Weigh the puppy or note body condition, and adjust portions with your vet
Per vet schedule	Vaccine series visits through about 16 weeks, and deworming as directed
Per vet schedule	Discuss spay or neuter timing, microchip, and licensing
Around 6 months	Check that adult teeth have come in and baby teeth are gone; move to two meals a day if your vet agrees
Around 12 months	Booster visit; talk to your vet about moving from puppy food to adult food, with large breeds switching later

SECTION 11

When to See a Vet

Puppies can go downhill fast, because small bodies dehydrate and lose blood sugar quickly. **When you are unsure whether to call, call.**

Go today, as an emergency:

- Bloody or severe diarrhea, repeated vomiting, or vomiting with lethargy, which may mean parvovirus
- Known or suspected swallowing of a toy, sock, bone, or any toxic substance, including xylitol, chocolate, grapes, or medication
- Difficulty breathing, blue or pale gums, collapse, or seizure
- Trembling, weakness, or wobbling in a toy-breed puppy, which can be low blood sugar
- Swollen, hard belly, repeated unproductive retching, or signs of pain
- Heatstroke signs: heavy panting, drooling, bright red gums, or weakness
- Trauma such as a fall, a bite from another animal, or being hit by a car, even if the puppy looks fine
- Not eating or drinking for a day, or refusing to stand

Book within a day or two:

- Soft stool that lasts more than a day
- A honking cough or runny nose
- Limping that does not improve
- Straining or frequent trips to urinate, or sudden accidents in a trained puppy
- Red, itchy skin, constant scratching, or scooting
- Squinting, discharge from eyes, or head shaking and ear odor
- Retained baby teeth when adult teeth are in

Bring vaccine records, a stool sample if possible, and notes on food, symptoms, and timing. Find an emergency clinic ahead of time and keep its number near your phone. For poison questions, the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center is at **(888) 426-4435** and the Pet Poison Helpline is at **(855) 764-7661**.

SECTION 12

FAQ

When can a puppy go outside?

Puppies can go to their own yard's potty spot on day one, since housetraining begins right away, but they should avoid public places where unvaccinated dogs go until your vet says the vaccine series is far enough along. Carrying your puppy, safe visits with healthy vaccinated dogs, and vaccination-checked puppy classes keep socialization going. Your vet knows the disease risk in your area and will tell you when sidewalks, parks, and trails are safe.

How often should I feed a puppy?

Most puppies eat three to four small meals a day from about 8 weeks to 12 to 16 weeks, then three meals, and then two meals a day by around 6 months, with your vet guiding the changes. Toy breeds may need more frequent meals to avoid low blood sugar. Use a complete-and-balanced puppy food, measure portions, and keep treats under about 10 percent of daily calories.

How much do puppies sleep?

Young puppies sleep about 18 to 20 hours a day, and that is normal and necessary for growth. Expect short bursts of play followed by deep naps. An overtired puppy can get nippy and wild, so build naps into the schedule, ideally in the crate. As puppies mature, they sleep less, and most adult dogs settle into 12 to 14 hours, though it varies.

How long does it take to housetrain a puppy?

Most puppies show real progress within a few weeks and have mostly reliable habits after a few months, but it varies with age, breed, and consistency. Small breeds often take longer because of tiny bladders. A rough guide is that a puppy can wait about its age in months plus one, in hours. Frequent trips, immediate rewards, and good supervision are the fastest route.

When do puppies stop teething?

Teething usually runs from about 3 to 7 months. Baby teeth (28) fall out as adult teeth (42) come in, and most puppies have all their adult teeth by about 6 to 7 months. Chewing can stay strong for some time afterward, especially in adolescence. Offer safe chews, supervise, and ask your vet to check for retained baby teeth.

What vaccines does a puppy need?

Your vet decides, but the usual pattern is a core series of the distemper and parvovirus combination vaccine, given in several visits a few weeks apart through about 16 weeks, and a rabies vaccine as required by law. Other vaccines, such as those for kennel cough or Lyme disease, depend on your puppy's risk. Heartworm and flea and tick prevention, and deworming, also start early.

How do I stop my puppy from biting?

Biting is normal puppy behavior, and the goal is to teach a soft mouth. When teeth touch skin, say "ouch," pause the game for a few seconds, and then redirect to a chew toy and praise. Give plenty of naps and exercise, since tired puppies bite more. Never hit or yell. If biting seems aggressive or is not improving, ask your vet or a positive-reinforcement trainer.

How do I crate train a puppy at night?

Put the crate near your bed, size it with a divider, and make it cozy. Take the puppy out right before bed, then crate it. If it cries, wait to see if it settles. If it needs to go, take it out quietly, with no play, and put it back. Expect one or two night trips at first, shrinking over several weeks. Never use the crate as punishment.

When should I start training my puppy?

Right away, on day one. Puppies can learn their name, sit, and where to potty at 8 weeks. Keep sessions to a few minutes, use small treats, and focus on positive reinforcement. Early socialization during the sensitive window of roughly 3 to 14 to 16 weeks matters most. Formal classes can start once your vet says the vaccine schedule allows.

When should I spay or neuter my puppy?

This is a decision for you and your vet, because timing varies with breed size, health, and your goals. Vets often recommend earlier for small dogs and may suggest waiting longer for large and giant breeds, whose growth can be affected. Ask about benefits and risks, and plan the timing at one of your first puppy visits.

Ready to shop? Start with Dogs!. 10% of every purchase supports no-kill animal shelters.

SECTION 13

Every Purchase Gives Back

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For puppy families, that gift has a special meaning. Shelters and rescues are full of dogs who started out as somebody's wiggly puppy, and a lot of them ended up there simply because a family did not know what to expect. You are reading this guide, which means you are doing it differently. If you are still deciding on a dog, please consider a shelter or rescue, where many wonderful puppies and young dogs are waiting.

We are a family business in Christiana, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. We grow our own food, keep our own animals, and stock the clean-label, American-made goods we would put in front of our own puppies: **no mystery ingredients**, no cheap filler toys. If you have a question about food, chews, crates, or what to pack for the first night, call us at **(717) 983-8069**. We would love to talk it over.

Congratulations on your new best friend. Be patient, be kind, keep the treats coming, and enjoy every sleepy, silly day of it.

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