

## Chapter 1

# No, Virginia, It's Not That Hard: Understanding Housetraining Basics

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Defining housetraining
  - ▶ Understanding why housetraining is important
  - ▶ Discovering two ways to housetrain
  - ▶ Dealing with the unexpected
  - ▶ Clarifying the housetrainer's role
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**M**ax, a 10-week-old Beagle, is delighting his new owner with his puppy antics but is dismaying her with his penchant for peeing all over her recently installed carpet. No matter how recently he tinkled outside, he always seems to have something left over with which to tinkle on the floor covering.

Allie, a 6-year-old Golden Retriever, would never pee on anyone's carpet. Her people can count on her to do her business three or four times a day: first thing in the morning, early in the afternoon, in the late afternoon (sometimes), and in the evening before she retires for the night. On the rare occasions that she needs an extra bathroom break, she lets her people know by heading to the back door and scratching it — or if her tummy is giving her trouble, by waking up one of her people to get her outside in time to avoid an accident.

Cody, a 3-year-old Chihuahua, can hold his water pretty well — sometimes. Other times, though, he seems to suffer from bathroom-manners amnesia or a sudden preference for taking a whiz any place except where he's supposed to.

Which of these dogs is housetrained? Which ones aren't? In this chapter, you not only find the answer to those two questions but also discover why housetraining plays such an important role in whether you and your dog can live happily ever after.

## *What Housetraining Is — and Why It Matters*

To know whether your dog is really housetrained, you need to understand exactly what housetraining is. Unfortunately, most dictionaries aren't all that helpful here. For example, the *Random House Dictionary* offers a two-word definition: "to housebreak." That doesn't tell you much — after all, you're not teaching your dog to break anything! The *American Heritage Dictionary* offers the same terse definition, although it does add that the term is primarily British.



No matter where the term *housetraining* originates, defining it still requires precision and directness. Simply put, *housetraining* is the process in which you teach your dog to eliminate when you want him to and where you want him to — and to refrain from eliminating at any other time or place.

That definition doesn't allow much room for errors or lapses. And clearly, when measured against those criteria, a dog who consistently does his duty outdoors or in a designated indoor area is fully housetrained. That's not the case, though, with a dog who usually tinkles outdoors, never tinkles outdoors, or only occasionally tinkles outdoors (or performs with similar levels of consistency in a predetermined indoor Bowser bathroom). Housetraining is one of those all-or-nothing cases. That being the case, Allie is the only dog in the chapter intro who you can consider truly housetrained.

Why does such precision matter? Simple: An otherwise well-behaved, healthy dog who doesn't know proper pooch potty protocol is much more likely to lose her home than a similar dog who knows her bathroom basics. No human being likes to have his home turned into a multiroom canine toilet — and if such a human can't teach his dog to take her bathroom business elsewhere, that dog is likely to find herself going elsewhere.

## *Why Your Dog Can't Be "a Little Bit Housetrained"*

Housetraining is an either-or proposition: Either a dog is house-trained, or she isn't. To say that a dog is "partially trained" or "a little bit housetrained" is like saying that a woman is "partially pregnant" or "a little bit pregnant." None of those terms compute.



If you consider your dog to be "a little bit housetrained," you're really saying that he hasn't completely learned proper bathroom manners yet. That means you can't really rely on him to go to the bathroom only where and when you want him to.

Until your dog is totally housetrained, you always face the chance that Lassie will decide to use your brand new area rug as her toilet or that Laddie will choose to anoint your mother-in-law's prized Chippendale chair. And of course, for some dogs, especially puppies, those chances are way better than even. That's certainly the case with Max, the young Beagle from the chapter intro who's been using that new carpet as his own personal potty.

But owners of adult dogs like Cody, the Chihuahua who's occasionally leaving unwelcome puddles throughout his owner's abode, also cope with unreliable canines. Cody appears to have forgotten the lessons in bathroom manners his owners taught him years ago — or perhaps he never quite understood those lessons in the first place. Chapter 9 describes typical cases of pooches who appear to have forgotten the fine art of proper canine bathroom behavior. Or maybe Cody doesn't feel well. Chapter 10 focuses on why a pooch may pee or poop inappropriately — and what owners can do to solve such problems.

But for now, it's fair to say that although housetraining is an either-or proposition, there's definitely more than one way to teach a dog proper potty behavior. Before you start, though, you need to get yourself and your household ready for the task. Chapter 2 helps you prepare by giving you a primer on canine instincts and on how to capitalize on those instincts to help your dog become a happy housetrainee. Chapter 3 focuses on equipping you, your home, and your dog to ensure housetraining success. And Chapter 4 hones in on a crucial component of the housetraining process: food. After all, what goes in your dog must eventually come out, in one form or another!

## ***Exploring Housetraining Methods***

Most people who choose to live with dogs want to be able to regulate their canines' bathroom department. They want their dogs to poop and pee where and when *they* (the people) choose.

Fortunately, you can choose between two methods designed to help you achieve this goal. The right choice for you and your dog depends on many factors, some of which relate less to your dog's needs than to your way of living. In this section, I discuss indoor and outdoor training and talk about some of the lifestyle issues that may help you choose one method over another.

### ***Location, location, location: Outdoor versus indoor training***

The two housetraining methods I discuss in this book are all about location — as in where you want your pooch to potty: indoors or outdoors.

#### ***Outdoor training***

If the idea of turning part of your house into a canine bathroom doesn't thrill you, you're far from alone. That same lack of enthusiasm is probably the primary reason that millions of dog owners train their four-legged friends to do their bathroom business outside. *Outdoor training* involves teaching a dog to eliminate in a potty area located outside your home. The potty area can be a designated spot in your backyard or wherever you allow your dog to do his business.

Outdoor training has plenty of advantages. First and foremost, as soon as your dog knows what he's supposed to do and where he's supposed to do it, you never again need to worry about canine waste marring your floors, staining your carpets, or otherwise stinking up your house. You also have more floor space to use and enjoy, because you don't have any newspapers, litter boxes, or other indoor canine bathroom paraphernalia to get in the way of household foot traffic. Finally, those who choose to walk their dogs outdoors can get some healthful, enjoyable exercise as well as some special bonding time with their canine companions. If these advantages appeal to you, head over to Chapter 6, which gives you the straight scoop on teaching your pooch to potty outside.

But outdoor training carries some disadvantages, too — just ask anyone who's had to go outside with his pooch on a cold or rainy night. Fortunately, a little extra training can go a long way toward alleviating the problem of the pooch who takes too long to do his business during bad weather. Chapter 8 offers ideas on how to teach your dog to become a proactive housetraining graduate and provides some hints on how to help your housetrainee expedite his excretions.



Don't think that letting your pooch potty in your yard relieves you of the obligation to clean up those deposits. Unless you like having bright yellow patches in the middle of your green grass (a problem I address in Chapter 3) or stepping in the other stuff — because that stuff generally doesn't degrade fast enough for you to totally avoid such missteps — plan on cleaning up after your four-legged friend even if his potty is on your property.

### ***Indoor training***

*Indoor training* involves teaching a dog to eliminate in a potty area located inside your home. The potty area can be some newspapers spread on the floor in one room, a litter box tucked discreetly into a corner, or some other device located in a designated area of your abode.

A dog who's indoor-trained makes a beeline for that indoor location whenever he feels the urge to eliminate. As soon as he's finished, cleanup is easy: You just flush the poop down the toilet and either throw away or clean the surface upon which the poop or pee landed.



Indoor training is a viable housetraining option if, for some reason, taking your dog outside to eliminate isn't practical. It's also worth trying if your adult dog and his waste byproducts are very small.

But indoor training carries some disadvantages. It's impractical if your dog is much bigger than toy-sized (consider how big that waste is likely to be). Moreover, if your canine companion is male, sooner or later he'll probably start lifting his leg when he pees. When that happens, his ability to aim accurately may decline. Instead of hitting the litter box, newspaper, or other toilet, he may leave a stinky puddle on your floor.

Either way, if you decide that indoor training is right for you and your dog, mosey on over to Chapter 7. There, you get the lowdown on how to get your four-legged friend to squat down in the proper indoor location.

## ***Looking at lifestyle factors to help you choose your method***

How do you decide which housetraining method works best for you? The right answer depends as much on your way of living as it does on your dog's needs.

Maybe you're one of those lucky people who not only work from home during the day but also have some nice outdoor places to walk to. For you, walking a dog can be a real pleasure — and at times even a sanity saver. A housetraining method that takes you and your dog outdoors is probably an attractive option.

Perhaps, though, you're an elderly person or a mobility-impaired individual who can't get out and around easily. The dog walk that's pure pleasure for your work-at-home neighbor may be pure torture for you. If this description fits you, the ideal housetraining method probably means never having to leave the house. Indoor training may be a better choice.

Or perhaps you live in a high-rise apartment building in the middle of the city. When your canine companion needs a potty break, you can't just snap on the leash, open the front door, and head out for a quick stroll or a trip to a designated doggie toilet area. Instead, your route to the great outdoors may require you and your dog to walk to the opposite end of a long hallway, wait for the elevator to stop at your floor, ride down to your building lobby on the elevator, and finally get yourselves to the proper spot outside. And all this time, your dog is expected to hold her water. If you and your dog face such obstacles *en route* to an outdoor bathroom, you may also want to consider keeping her potty indoors.

Those are just a few examples of how your lifestyle can affect the housetraining method you select for your four-legged friend. No matter which method you choose, this book gives you detailed instructions on how to housetrain your dog.

## ***Surviving Setbacks and Special Situations***

Although housetraining is generally a straightforward process, chances are you'll encounter setbacks during the training period. And even when your four-legged friend becomes a housetraining graduate, he's bound to do some occasional backsliding. In any

case, you'll likely see situations in which your consistently rock-solid housetrainee suddenly seems to lose his edge, and neither you nor he knows why.

For setbacks during the housetraining period, Chapters 6 and 7 offer guides for troubleshooting bathroom errors. In those chapters, you find questions that can help you determine the mistakes you made that led to that unauthorized puddle or pile (and yes, during this period, generally any doggie accidents result from your mistakes).

Post-housetraining backsliding can be a little more complicated, but here, too, help is at hand. Although every dog is an individual, almost every healthy housetraining-challenged dog fits one of ten broad profiles. Chapter 9 describes these profiles in detail and outlines options so you can either help your dog overcome her housetraining challenges or, in a few cases, live with your dog and her disabilities.

That said, a lot of apparently housetraining-challenged dogs really don't have bathroom issues at all: Instead, they're feeling under the weather. Some of the maladies that result in doggie bathroom lapses are minor, and others aren't. Chapter 10 lists some of the most common bathroom-related symptoms, suggests possible causes of those symptoms, and recommends steps to take.

## *Understanding the Role You and Your Family Play*

Most dog trainers say that the most important part of their jobs isn't training dogs — it's training the humans to train the dogs. In Chapter 12, you discover the ten most common human housetraining hang-ups and how to prevent them.

You and the other humans in your life play crucial roles in your dog's housetraining progress and ultimate success (or lack thereof). Not only do you teach your dog the ins and outs of proper potty protocol, but you also create the conditions that can make or break a housetraining program. For one thing, house-training needs to be a family affair. Here's why:

- ✓ **To keep the diet consistent:** No matter how diligently you're trying to regulate Sparky's bathroom urges by regulating the kind and amount of food you feed him, such diligence is all for naught if your partner or child is sneaking the dog snacks all the while.

✓ **To help you avoid burnout:** Housetraining can be pretty simple, but it can also be pretty tedious when just one person is doing the day-in, day-out routine of feeding, walking, and confining the housetrainee.

Chapter 11 helps you get all the humans in your household, including the kids, on the same page so you can all housetrain Sparky together.

But maybe getting your family on board isn't your problem. Maybe you're trying to deal with housetraining a dog while working away from home all day. Even well into the 21st century, corporate America still isn't all that great about accommodating the needs of employees' family members, whether those members are human or canine. Chapter 11 offers suggestions on how to give your housetrainee some daytime relief and still keep your job.

The same chapter also covers coping strategies for other special situations, such as traveling with a dog you're trying to housetrain or even just providing for the bathroom needs of a housetraining graduate while you're on the road.



Your dog or puppy has all the instincts and desire he needs to motivate him to acquire good bathroom manners — he just needs you to get him going. Do the job right, and not only will your dog become a housetraining ace, but the two of you will build a bond that goes the distance for years to come.