

Article 29

Holiday hints from the Canine Corner (2)

Dear Gus,

I have recently gotten a puppy, and know that I will not have the time or the "stick-to-it-ness" to attend training classes with him. What would you recommend as the absolute necessity for training?

Denise S. Orange

Dear Denise,

You would be surprised at how often I'm asked this question.

First off, please make sure that you understand that getting a puppy is a 10 to 15 year commitment to an animal. And if your pet does not have good manners, it can be a very difficult 10 to 15 years. One of the most common reasons pets wind up in animal shelters is due to the lack of training as a youngster. Training your pet now is making a long-term investment in both your and your pet's happiness - think about it like a 401K - an investment that pays back many times over what you put into it today.

That said, at a minimum, your pet should be absolutely 100 percent obedient to either the sit or down command. Obedience to one of these commands can save his life. For example, if he tries to bolt out of the door onto a busy street, a quick "sit" command would stop him from bolting. It also would mean that when a guest arrives at your home, you avoid chaos at the front door, where your dog may sniff or jump on guests.

Training either of these commands requires repetition with lots of practice. To start, you can use a reward that you bring from directly in front of your pet to up and slightly behind his head, which will make him look up and sit naturally. Give the command "sit" as he follows the reward. Then give the reward with lots of praise. Repeat this several times a session, with once or twice daily sessions, until he associates the command "sit" with the action of sitting. Next begin to only give the reward intermittently, but continue with the praise when he sits. Finally, eliminate the reward and use only praise as the reward.

For everyone that already owns a pet here are some seasonal safety tips:

If you are traveling any distance with your pet, bring along his or her health information, any medications, and a crate for safety and security. It's also a good idea to either have your micro-chipped or tattooed for identification, since if you become separated he might not know the way back to you.

If you have a Christmas tree in the house, remember how curious dogs are about new things. Your pet may see the tree as a new fire hydrant, and eliminate on it. If you use a preservative in the water for the tree, make sure your pet cannot drink it, since some of the types are toxic. Be careful that your pet does not have access to the electrical cords, since chewing on them can result in electrocution. Swallowing tinsel can result in an intestinal blockage, while a broken ornament can cause bad cuts. Poinsettia

and holly berries and leaves, even mistletoe, are also poisonous, so these plants should be kept out of your pet's reach. If you have a wood-burning fireplace, make sure that you use a fire screen.

Open trash receptacles have the temptation of poultry bones and other scraps. If your pet eats scraps they can cause a variety of digestive disorders, all the way from vomiting to a lacerated intestine. Chocolate is toxic to dogs, so should be kept away from your pet.

Be aware of any leaking antifreeze in the garage or driveway, since its sweet taste is very attractive to dogs. Even a small amount of antifreeze can be deadly.

Above all, to both our human and canine companions, have the very best Holiday

Season, and a Happy, healthy, and Prosperous New Year.

Gus.

BACK