

VOLUME 12  
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# The Whole



# Dog Journal™

A monthly guide to natural dog care and training

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PHOTO COURTESY OF JEFF POMONOSKY

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# Color Us Happy

*Let's face it: Dogs are colorful critters!*

BY NANCY KERNS

**H**ey! Notice anything different? Color! I've been whining and begging our publisher for color for quite some time, and I'm thrilled that the powers that be recently agreed that pictures of dogs (and even dog-care products and foods!) are just way more interesting when they can be seen in color. And stay tuned for another exciting development – one that will powerfully reward subscribers who register for access to the digital edition of WDJ.

My enthusiasm over its color notwithstanding, this is a great issue. Starting on the facing page, Pat Miller describes where and how to best conduct a search for a new dog. She promotes shelter dogs, of course, but also offers tips on buying a pup from that rare creature, the “responsible breeder.” They *do* exist, and can be distinguished from frauds, if you know what to look for.

I recently met a young couple who had an amazing experience with a *highly* responsible breeder. The couple resides in the Bay Area, but learned about a litter of Shiba Inu puppies in Oregon. They drove 10 hours to meet the breeder, the dam, and the puppies, and answered countless questions from the breeder about their home and intentions for the pup they fell in love with. Most breeders would have been satisfied with this couple (and their money). *This* breeder insisted on driving the 10 hours back to the Bay Area to make sure the couple's home and yard was suitable for safely raising one of her puppies! Only then did she complete the sale. She has called the pup's new owners to

check in and answer questions, and reminds them frequently that she'll take the pup back, no questions asked, if they ever decide not to keep her. *That's* a responsible breeder.

Starting on page 8, agility enthusiast and occasional contributor Lorie Long explains everything you need to know about pet health insurance. After editing the article, I asked for and received price quotes for various insurance plans for my dog, Otto. I'm still wading through the responses, and though I'm not yet sure which plan will best suit Otto's needs, I do know I'll be signing up for *one* of them.

Did you know that not all dogs know how to doggie paddle, and many need to be taught to swim? Our resident triathlete/dog trainer/writer, Susan Sarubin, describes the best way to introduce your dog to the sport of swimming, starting on page 18.

Pat Miller pulls double duty in this issue, explaining (on page 19) how to train your dog to “wait” and “stay” – and teaching us the difference between these behaviors. Otto and I frequently use Pat's techniques when we practice “wait” and “stay” at my local post office. (We pick up the mail at night, when no one else is around.) Otto has advanced

to staying even when the motion-activated front doors open or close as he holds a sit outside, craning his head to try to see me without moving from his spot. These techniques really work, folks! Give them a try with your dog!

NK



**MISSION STATEMENT:** WDJ's mission is to provide dog guardians with in-depth information on effective holistic healthcare methods and successful nonviolent training. The methods we discuss will endeavor to do no harm to dogs; we do not advocate perpetrating even minor transgressions in the name of “greater good.” We intend our articles to enable readers to immediately apply training and healthcare techniques to their own dogs with visible and enjoyable success. All topics should contribute to improving the dog's health and vitality, and deepening the canine/human bond. Above all, we wish to contribute information that will enable consumers to make kind, healthy, and informed decisions about caring for their own dogs.

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# Pick a Winner

*Where to look for, and how to select your next dog.*

BY PAT MILLER

**T**hinking of getting a new dog? Chances are you're inundated with well-intentioned advice from every friend, family member, and canine professional you know about where to go and who to avoid in your quest to find your next canine pal. You may also feel the added burden of finding the right dog – one who will be as close to perfect as caninely possible. It's an awesome challenge.

Many years ago, I was living on my own for the first time, and missed having a dog in my life. I went on a Collie search, and soon answered an ad in the paper for Marty's Pride, a tri-color Rough Collie whose owner had gone off to college. Marty was near canine-perfect: the first dog I showed in AKC obedience competition (he earned his Companion Dog title in three trials with scores of 194.5, 196, and 197), and the first dog I ever owned who

died of old age. He was also the last dog I deliberately went looking to adopt. Since then my selections have been much more serendipitous. My husband and I tend to adopt the dogs who find us, or we trip over them at the shelter and bring them home.

I realize that we're the exception, not the rule. Most people make more deliberate decisions than we do about the kind of dog they want, and where to find him – or her. Those decisions, although deliberate, are not always wise. I'm constantly amazed by the number of clients in my behavior consultation practice who thought they were making well-educated, well-researched decisions about the acquisition of their new four-legged family member, and ended up with something vastly different from what they expected. So how do you make an educated, responsible decision about selecting your next dog?



**Many people have a serious misconception about shelters, regarding them as containing only "reject" dogs. Of course, you *can* find dogs with health and/or behavior problems there. But shelters also contain many healthy, well-behaved, loving dogs – purebred *and* mixed – victims of difficult human circumstances.**

## What you can do . . .

- Consider getting your next dog from a shelter or breed rescue group. If you are patient, you will find just the right dog.
- If you buy a purebred from a breeder, insist on meeting the puppy's mother and observing the environment in which the puppy was raised. Truly responsible breeders will not object to these minimal requests.
- If you find a stray dog and are thinking about keeping her, take her to your local shelter so she can be scanned for an identification microchip and file a "found dog" report. These steps protect your future ownership rights to the dog.



## Adoption options

The advice you receive from friends and professionals can be conflicting and confusing. "Only buy from a responsible breeder." "There's no such thing as a responsible breeder; you should only adopt from a shelter." "Omgosh you're adopting from the shelter? Their dogs all have major behavior problems and kennel cough! You should adopt from a rescue group." "Shelter or rescue? You don't know what you're getting. The only way to be sure of what you're getting is to purchase a puppy from a breeder." So who's right and who's wrong? They all are.

There are lots of different places you can go to get a dog. Some are better than



**It's hard not to take it personally, but don't be offended if a breeder won't sell you a puppy. Instead, try to understand her reasons. She may give you vital information about what it takes to truly succeed with that breed.**

others, and there are some you should never patronize. Here's a guide to help you maximize your chance of getting the dog you want:

■ **Animal shelters.** This is my personal first choice. I am painfully aware that there are good shelters and not-so-good ones (see "Gimme Shelter," WDJ Jan 2009). If you live near a good one, your adoption process will be facilitated by knowledgeable and friendly adoption counselors who can help you make a good decision about your new family member.

In the good shelters, staff will have conducted behavioral assessments of the adoption dogs, which will provide you with useful information and help you determine if the dog might be a good match.

If you live near a not-so-good shelter you have a choice – to adopt from that shelter, conducting your own impromptu assessment and risking diseases such as kennel cough and parvo that lurk in the corners of substandard facilities, or to travel a greater distance to adopt from a better quality shelter.

A really good shelter will give you a thorough and human-friendly vetting before they'll agree to adopt one of their dogs to you. If they fall a little short on the customer-relations end of things, have patience and remember, it's only because they really are concerned that their dogs go to lifelong loving homes. This caveat holds for any of the best placement programs

– they will check you out carefully, and may sometimes be a little overzealous in those efforts.

Don't rule out shelters if you're looking for a particular breed or mix – many breeds show up in shelters with disturbing frequency. Ask your shelter if they have a waiting list or "wish list" for approved adopters who want to adopt a specified breed or type of dog. Then get your name on the list.

If you know what you're looking for and what to watch out for, you can find great dogs in almost any bona fide shelter. If you lack experience or confidence in your dog selection talents, take along a knowledgeable friend or positive canine professional to help you make a good choice.

■ **Rescue groups.** Another place to find the specific breed you want is a "breed rescue." Like shelters, rescue groups can be good, bad, or ugly. Many breed-rescue groups are affiliated with breed clubs and tend to be responsible about healthcare, spaying and neutering, behavior assessment, and placement. Some even commit significant resources to medical treatment and behavior modification before placing their canine wards. But not all.

Non-affiliated rescue groups, especially those who rescue all breeds and mixes, or a wide variety of breeds and mixes, sometimes take on far more dogs than they can care for. Some end up more

closely resembling hoarders than rescuers, neglecting the very dogs they claim to have saved. We absolutely encourage you to adopt from legitimate rescue groups, breed-affiliated or not. If you come across the non-legitimate variety in your travels, report them to the authorities.

You may be tempted to adopt one of the sad faces in a substandard rescue facility. If you do, know that you have a significantly greater likelihood of taking home a dog with physical, medical, and/or behavioral challenges.

■ **Responsible breeders.** Yes, they do exist, although I know there are some who fancy themselves as "responsible" who wouldn't fit my definition of the word. The list of qualities to look for in a breeder is long, but some of the most important are:

- Breeds mentally and physically healthy, genetically sound puppies.
- Socializes the puppies well to a variety of places and things as well as to people.
- Breeds no more puppies than she can find homes for.
- *Requires* spay/neuter for all puppies not destined for the show ring.
- Screens prospective puppy homes carefully and only sells to appropriate private-home buyers who can provide lifelong loving care.
- Allows the buyer to meet the mother of the puppies, and the father too, if he's on the premises.
- Educates buyers about needs of dogs in general and the specific breed in particular. Will not sell a puppy to a person with unrealistic expectations of the breed.
- Provides follow-up to be sure pups are doing well and keeps in touch with owner for the life of the dog.
- Provides resources and support for owners who are having problems with their dogs.
- Takes back dogs who were sold *any time, for any reason, for the life of the dog.*

That's a start; a much more compre-

hensive list can be found at [wonderpuppy.net/1breeding.php](http://wonderpuppy.net/1breeding.php). By the way, responsible breeders *never*:

- Sell puppies to pet stores.
- Sell sight unseen over the Internet. (They may have a website, but actual sales are personal, and the breeder should want to meet the buyer and have the buyer meet the puppy.)
- Meet you halfway and sell you the puppy out of the back of a truck.
- Prevent you from seeing the conditions under which the puppies were raised.

When I was still at the Marin Humane Society, in the early 1990s, we conducted a project to offer responsible breeders the opportunity to reclaim dogs of their breeding that had ended up at our shelter for any reason. Over a two-year period we received about 30 purebred dogs whose breeders we were able to identify and contact. Of those 30, only two came to reclaim their dogs, and at least one of those two was what many would probably have called a “backyard” breeder because she wasn’t involved in showing or competing with her dogs. That project was an eye-opener for us about the percentage of truly responsible breeders in the real world.

■ **Private adoptions.** This covers a broad range of possibilities – including answering an ad in the paper like I did for my wonderful Collie; helping out a friend whose circumstances require her to give up her dog; taking in the canine companion of a friend or relative who has passed away; or falling for a “free to a good home” opportunity in front of a supermarket. You may even find you’ve been named as legal custodian for a friend’s dog in her will!

These can be great adoptions, or caveat emptor situations. If you can find the dog you’re looking for in the newspaper, you can skip the middleman (shelter or rescue group) and save the dog (and his human) a lot of stress. We’re talking adolescent to adult dogs here; responsible breeders *never* sell their pups through newspaper ads.

Look for key words in the ads that give you a clue as to why the dog is being given up. Phrases like “Needs ‘only dog’ home,” or “Not good with kids” tell you the dog has a behavior history that might be cause for concern. Ask the owner why he’s giving

up the dog, and then weigh the trustworthiness of the answer in light of your own observations. In these days of foreclosures there are lots of good dogs going homeless for very legitimate reasons.

If you’re taking on the dog of a friend or family member, you probably already knew the dog before you agreed to take him. Be sure all parties are clear – in writing – about legal custody. Who will make decisions about the dog’s health and future, and who pays all the bills? What sort of visitation rights will the original owner have? If circumstances change, will the dog go back to the original owner or stay with you?

As always, use sound judgment when considering the adoption of a dog that someone else is giving up. Conduct your own behavior assessment to confirm the dog is someone you can love and live with for life, before making the commitment to bring her home.

■ **Found strays.** One of my clients recently adopted a dog she found – or who found her. Maryann wasn’t really looking for a dog; she was perfectly happy with her Lhasapoo, Xena. But when an adolescent American Eskimo showed up on her doorstep she invited him in. She notified the shelter that he was with them

and spent the next 30 days in fear that someone would claim him. Dexter is now a permanent part of the family.

In some locations, you have lots of opportunities to find and keep stray dogs. In other, more responsible communities, not so much. Bear in mind that most strays are not “professional” strays (as in “street dogs,” or feral), but rather dogs who got separated from an owner who cares about them, or perhaps dogs who were recently abandoned due to current economic conditions. In any case, if you find a stray you’re thinking of keeping, you *must* make an effort to find the owner, by leaving a “found dog” report with your local shelter, placing an ad in the paper, putting up posters, having him scanned for a microchip, and of course, calling any number provided on an ID tag and/or license on his collar.

Remember, you’re not morally obligated to keep a stray dog just because you found him. If you’re over your limit – legally, financially, or personally – or if he’s not a good fit for your family, you won’t be doing him any favors by trying to keep him.

■ **Petfinder.** In a class by itself, Petfinder is an online clearinghouse of information ([petfinder.com](http://petfinder.com)) about dogs (and other animals) of all breeds and mixes avail-



**All found strays should be scanned for a microchip and examined for a tattoo, to make sure they aren’t owned and deeply missed by an unlucky owner. Also, a report of the found dog should be filed with your local shelter.**

able for adoption from groups across the entire country. If you're looking for a specific breed or mix, it's almost guaranteed you can find it on Petfinder. Then you're only faced with the challenge of a "sight unseen" adoption – not something I recommend. I suggest you use Petfinder to locate suitable dogs near you to consider for adoption, unless you're willing to travel to meet them and bring them home if they meet your requirements.

■ **Pet stores? NEVER!** The only positive about purchasing a puppy from a pet store is that you are essentially paying to rescue that doggie in the window – so it's a good thing for that individual pup. I do have some clients who are completely happy with their pet store puppy purchase. But I have many more who love their dogs but are faced with problems common to pet store dogs, and regret not having made a wiser adoption choice. The risks related to buying pet store puppies so greatly outweigh the single good that we vehemently urge you to never even let the thought cross your mind.

For starters, when you purchase a pet store puppy, you are supporting the horrendous puppy mill industry. Every dollar you spend to rescue that beguiling face in the window goes to produce, market, and sell more puppies who are raised in substandard conditions by mothers who are nothing more than breeding machines, callously discarded when they can no longer

produce. Don't believe the store manager who reassures you that their puppies come from "responsible breeders." No responsible breeder on earth sells puppies to pet stores. **Not one.**

Parents of pet store puppies are unlikely to have had any screening for hip dysplasia, eye problems, or any of the other myriad of genetic defects common to various dog breeds, so the chances are far greater that your pup will suffer from one or more of these debilitating defects in his lifetime. The puppies and their parents may have missed out on some important healthcare practices, such as routine worming and vaccinations. Worse, they are almost guaranteed to have missed out on the socialization experiences that are *critical* to normal social development. The sooner people stop buying pet store puppies, the sooner pet stores will stop selling them, and the sooner puppy mills and other irresponsible breeders will start going out of business.

### The how of selection

You've determined the source from which you want to acquire your next dog, or at least identified which sources are the most likely candidates for you. The next question is how. How do you decide which dog is the right one? Let's assume the family has come to agreement about breed, or at least variables like size and type.

If you're purchasing a pup from a responsible breeder, she will guide you

in selecting the best pup for your circumstances and dog-owning goals. If you want to show or compete, she'll have a good idea which of her pups are best suited for that. If you want a family companion, she'll identify which pups in the litter are best suited for that role.

On the other hand, if she thinks your situation is totally unsuited for her breed – an active Border Collie or vocal Sheltie in a small apartment – she'll tell you that too, and then decline to sell you a puppy. Take her advice to heart, rethink your adoption choice, and don't just go get a puppy of the same breed from a less responsible source.

If you're adopting from a good shelter or rescue, they will already have performed behavior assessments on your pool of prospective adoption choices, and will help you make an educated selection. If you're doing a private adoption or looking to a group that doesn't assess, you'll want to do your own assessment to explore a few behaviors before you adopt.

If you are a novice dog owner, I recommend taking along a more knowledgeable a friend, or a behavior/training professional who offers pet selection services, to help you with your decision. If you are reasonably knowledgeable about dogs and dog behavior, you should be able to determine at least some basic important qualities about your prospective adoptee on your own. Things to look for include:

■ Does the dog happily approach to greet you? A fearful dog is probably not well-socialized, and it will take a lot of work (behavior modification) to help him become "normal." Love is not enough! Unless you are very skilled in training and behavior and ready to commit to a significant behavior modification program, I suggest you resist the temptation to rescue a shy dog, and instead adopt a friendly one. Friendly dogs need homes, too!

■ Is he more interested in you or the environment? Social dogs want to hang out with people. If he totally ignores you, it will be harder to create the kind of relationship most people are looking for with their dogs.

■ Does the dog play well? He may or may not play with toys (some dogs need to be taught how to play with toys), but will he follow you and romp a little with you? Does he get too aroused while play-

PHOTO BY LENNOX JOSIVNA



**Pet supply stores should never supply their customers with pets! All puppies in pet stores (like this one in New York City) come from puppy mills and irresponsible breeders. All of them, no matter what the employees allege.**

## Behavioral Assessment: Yes or No?

Dog professionals seem to love controversy, and the behavioral assessment process, sometimes called “temperament testing,” has certainly received its share. But published studies confirm what many behavior professionals have long said: that a behavior assessment is a useful tool for helping to describe an individual dog, and provides information that helps adoption counselors make reasonable and appropriate matches with prospective homes.

A temperament test makes observations about a dog on a given day in the shelter under a given set of circumstances. While some conclusions can be drawn from the assessments process, it does not provide any guarantee as to how the dog will behave on a different day, in a different location, or under a different set of circumstances.

These days, good, better, and best shelters and rescue groups routinely conduct behavioral assessments of incoming dogs. Some will reassess 15 to 30 days later, as behavior can change over time, especially in a high-activity, stressful shelter or kennel environment. When considering your adop-

tion options and a shelter or rescue facility, be sure to ask to see assessment information and have someone explain the findings to you.

The controversial aspect of the behavior assessment tool has to do with its application for making euthanasia decisions. While its primary purpose at shelters is to help adoption counselors make good matches, inevitably there are times when a dog “fails” the assessment, and in a full-service shelter, depending on the severity of the behavior and availability of resources, is either slated for behavior modification courtesy of the shelter’s behavior department, possible delivery to a rescue group, or euthanasia.

At best, the assessment process is imperfect, but shelters shouldn’t be faulted for using the tool to help make difficult triage decisions about who lives and who dies. Until there are more homes than dogs, it’s a tough job that has to fall on someone’s shoulders. Properly conducted assessments help make those difficult decisions a little more appropriate, and a little less difficult.

ing, mouthing you, jumping on you, and unwilling to calm down when you’re ready to stop? Does he have a playful world view, or does he seem very serious? Again, a playful dog will be easier to train and bond with; a serious one may be more challenging to motivate and interact with.

■ Is he easily aroused? Most pups bite some, as they explore their world with their mouths. But adolescent dogs and adults should have learned that putting teeth on humans isn’t acceptable behavior. If the dog in question gets overaroused easily, to the point of hard biting, non-stop biting, biting clothes, or growling, snapping, and snarling, he’s a good one to avoid.

■ Will he eat treats? Most positive training relies at least part of the time on reinforcement with food. If the dog won’t take treats he could be too stressed (anorexia is a sign of stress) or he could be a dog who is not highly motivated by food – which will make training more challenging, especially if he’s also not interested in playing (another very useful reinforcer).

■ If the dog will take treats, can you get him to sit? Put the treat right at the end of his nose, and slowly move it back over his head. If he jumps up to get it, whisk it out of sight for a second, then try again. When he sits, say “Yes!” and feed him a bit of the treat, then try again. If he starts offering sits for your treat after a few repetitions, you have a solid-gold winner. If it’s difficult to

get him to sit, and/or he doesn’t seem to get the idea after several repetitions, he’ll be a more challenging dog to train.

■ Try holding him close and looking at his teeth a few times in a row, then (carefully!) hugging him. If he resists restraint and becomes aroused, pulling away from you, perhaps even using his teeth, he probably won’t be a warm, cuddly dog – which is fine if that’s not what you want. Probably not a good choice for kids, though, who tend to want a lot of physical contact with their canine pals.

■ Speaking of kids, the dog will need to meet any human youngsters in your immediate family, and should absolutely adore them. Any reluctance on the dog’s part to engage with the kids should rule him out as an adoption prospect. Dogs who live with kids need to love them, not just tolerate them. You should also introduce your adoption prospect to any dogs you currently own before making a final commitment to adopt. Again, ideally you’ll see joyful acceptance on both sides of the canine equation. Anything less is a sign that behavior work might be necessary to keep peace in the pack.

■ Take a wooden spoon along with you in your assessment kit. While someone else holds the leash, set a bowl of food on the floor (dry food with some canned mixed in for palatability) and let the dog start eating. When he’s happily engaged, walk

toward him. Watch for signs of tension: he eats faster, moving his nose into the bowl, or stops moving altogether, looking at you out of the corner of his eye. If you see tension, stop. If not, touch him with the wooden spoon, then put the spoon in the bowl and press it against his muzzle. Again, if you see tension, stop. If not, have the other person move him away from the bowl with the leash and pick the bowl up. Be careful! Dogs who are stressed about you being near their food can become ferocious very quickly.

Tension, growling, or snapping around food or other high-value objects is called “resource-guarding.” This is often a modifiable behavior, and it can also be a dangerous one. Dogs who show signs of resource-guarding should *not* go to homes with children, and are best adopted by an experienced dog owner who is willing to use positive, non-violent methods to modify the behavior.

■ I would not recommend adopting any dog who shows signs of shyness or aggression, including resource-guarding, or a dog who easily becomes highly aroused, unless you are a skilled and experienced owner looking for a long-term project. 🐾

*Pat Miller, CPDT, is WDJ’s Training Editor. She lives in Hagerstown, Maryland, site of her Peaceable Paws training center. Pat is also author of four books on positive dog training. See “Resources,” page 24, for more information.*

# What's Your Policy?

*Why pet health insurance is a good idea, and how to choose a plan.*

BY LORIE LONG

Last year my Border Terrier, Dash, received advanced canine dental treatments to the tune of more than \$2,500 (described in "Improve Your Dental Acuity," WDJ July 2008). Her root canal, surgical extraction, and periodontal treatments were necessary to improve her health, but they certainly stretched my checkbook until I could hear the twang!

Fortunately, I was able to afford these procedures. But, who knows what could happen next to either of my two dogs, and how much it might cost? And how can I be prepared to provide a lifetime of high

quality healthcare when my next puppy comes along? For the first time I am seriously considering the benefits of pet health insurance for my dogs (both seniors), and, especially, for any young dog who joins my family in the future.

Advances in veterinary science have led to the availability of high-tech wellness care, diagnostic testing, treatments, and surgical procedures. Cancer care, MRIs, pacemakers, joint replacements, and, yes, advanced dental care are increasingly common. Many private veterinary practices now offer high-tech procedures previously offered only at regional, specialty referral clinics.

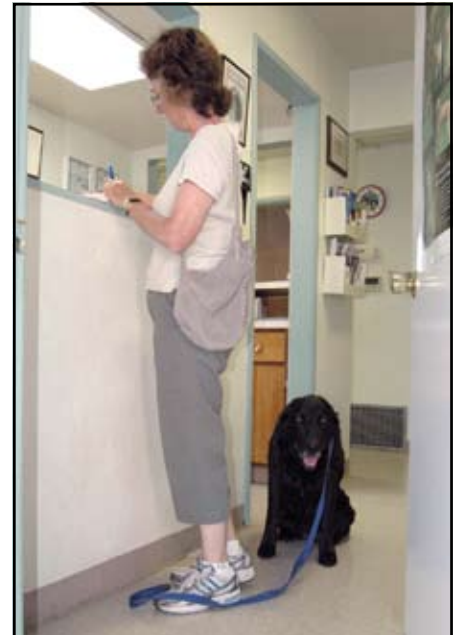
The American Pet Products Association (APPA) estimates that, in 2008, dog owners spent more than \$10 billion on veterinary care. The APPA's 2007/2008 national pet survey reported that the average "routine veterinary visit" for a dog cost more than \$200, and the average "surgical vet visit" cost more than \$450. Advanced, high-tech treatments cost much more.

If you want to provide your dog with high quality healthcare throughout his life, pet health insurance deserves a serious look. And since you can't buy health insurance for your dog when you really need it most, like in an emergency, or when a pre-existing condition erupts into a critical situation, now is the best time to look into health insurance that could save you hundreds or even thousands of dollars.

## What's available

Currently, a number of companies offer some type of pet health insurance in the U.S. Just like with human health insurance, there are several vastly different types of coverage a pet owner can buy.

Classic pet health insurance is intended to cover expensive, unplanned events. Like health insurance policies for humans, most canine policies come with monthly premiums, a variety of deductible



**Most pet health insurance companies require that you pay your vet at the time of service; the insurance company reimburses you later for the portion of the bill they will cover.**

choices, various coverage levels, co-pays, and caps that limit total annual or lifetime payouts.

Canine health insurance policies may exclude older dogs or particular breeds from coverage, as well as certain genetically based conditions common to particular breeds. The policies normally exclude pre-existing conditions and may offer discounts for covering more than one pet member of a family.

Wellness coverage is one of the many choices available in classic insurance policies, along with prescription drug coverage, cancer treatment coverage, alternative therapies, accidental death, etc. Wellness packages generally offer preventative services such as vaccines, annual check-ups, and blood tests at a set rate.

Then there are variations – policies that cover only catastrophic illnesses, or, at the

## What you can do . . .

- Think about your dog's health, age, predisposition to accidents, and risk of inherited disease to help you decide what level of coverage you should investigate.
- Get price quotes from every company that offers plans that seem to meet your needs.
- Ask your veterinarian (or her office staff) about the insurance providers they like the best; they should be able to steer you away from companies that make their paperwork difficult to complete, or who reimburse owners very slowly.
- If possible, don't allow your coverage to lapse if your dog is diagnosed with a condition requiring ongoing treatment; it may be excluded as a pre-existing condition later in his life.





other end of the spectrum, plans that cover catastrophic care as well as regular wellness care and even alternative therapies like acupuncture. Some have options for dental care and prescription drug coverage. Some policies include a lost pet recovery service option or other “value-added” incentives. Of course, the costs for these plans vary significantly.

Insurance is the most effective method of mitigating high-tech veterinary expenses, but it’s underutilized. I asked Dr. Tim Banker, a member of a Greensboro, North Carolina, primary care veterinary practice (and my dogs’ dentist), about the practice’s experiences with pet health insurance. “Only five clients have involved us in the claims process,” he said.

One possible barrier to widespread acceptance by many pet owners is the persistence of stories about insurance companies that fail to cover what owners thought they would cover. It sometimes seems that unless the veterinarians fill out the paperwork just so, with the codes and abbreviations aligning properly, like stars in the heavens, many claims go unpaid. “There is an ‘art’ to knowing how to define the dental condition so that the insurance company accepts it,” Dr. Banker says.

I asked Dr. Banker if his specialty practice offered in-house discounts on expensive procedures to clients without insurance coverage. “Special programs are related to wellness services where there is more profit margin to work with. Advanced dental services are much more expensive to provide,” he explained. In other words, insurance is the best way for an owner to manage these expenses.

## Company descriptions

Let’s look at the companies that are currently in operation.

### ■ AKC Pet Healthcare Plan

Underwritten by Markel Insurance Company, the American Kennel Club describes its plans as offering “individual claim evaluation, without complicated procedure limit maximums or benefit schedules.” That approach works as long as the evaluator agrees with your assessment of the reimbursements owed to you from the insurance company. There’s a 60-day Trial Plan, if activated within 28 days of AKC registration, for purebred dogs. The AKC also offers a plan that provides only accident coverage, at extremely low rates, so owners can cover “‘unlucky’ situations

## Insuring You Understand These Terms

The world of health insurance has a language of its own. We’ve defined some of the terms you should be familiar with:

**Benefit schedule** – Allowable charges for specific treatments defined by the insurance company in its policy. These charges may or may not equal the actual charges billed by your veterinarian for the treatments.

**Co-pay** – The portion of each veterinary bill the policyholder must pay before the insurance company becomes responsible for its payment. The amount varies according to the individual policy and is *not* cumulative. For instance, if your policy calls for a \$20 co-pay, you must pay \$20 toward each and every veterinary bill invoiced in the policy period.

**Coverage level** – Restrictions outlining the payment responsibilities of the insurance company, including maximum payout amounts, types of treatments included in the plan, and types of conditions included in the plan.

**Deductible** – The portion of the veterinary bill the policyholder must pay before the insurance company becomes responsible for any payments. The amount varies according to the individual policy and is cumulative. For instance, if your annual policy calls for a \$500 deductible, you will have satisfied your deductible after having paid \$500 in veterinary bills during the plan period, and the insurance company will pay future bills invoiced in the policy period according to other policy guidelines.

**Premium** – The cost of the health insurance policy, usually paid to the insurance provider monthly or annually.

**Wellness care** – Usually an add-on to a health insurance policy to cover preventative treatments like regular dental cleaning, heartworm testing, and fecal exams.

[listed in the plan] that frequently lead to high vet bills,” such as bite wounds, trauma, lacerations, fractures, and poison ingestion.

AKC Pet Healthcare Plan  
Raleigh, North Carolina  
(866) 725-2747  
akcphp.com

### ■ ASPCA Pet Health Insurance

The ASPCA has offered pet health insurance since 1997, and currently offers five pet health insurance plans with increasing levels of coverage. Owners must purchase the additional “continuing care option” for each plan if they want plan coverage for an illness or injury that showed symptoms or was treated in one plan period and requires care in another plan period, unless 180 days have passed from cure and last treatment. Some of these illnesses are relatively common, like allergies, diabetes, osteoarthritis, and cancer. The plans exclude acupuncture, chiropractic, and rehabilitative therapies, and vaccine antibody titer testing.

ASPCA Pet Health Insurance  
Canton, Ohio  
(866) 820-7764  
hartvillegroup.com

### ■ Embrace Pet Insurance

Laura Bennett, a co-founder of Embrace Pet Insurance, wanted to offer pet health insurance policies that were not just “small, medium, or large.” She designed Embrace’s plan to give consumers many choices. Embrace offers more than 108 coverage variations so they can customize a plan for any particular dog living in any area. “We customize policies according to risk based on the type of pet and where you live,” she explains.

Embrace considers the hereditary conditions common to a dog’s breed, chronic conditions already present in the dog, and the area of the country in which the pet and owner live, all of which dictate the anticipated cost of healthcare for the dog, when pricing a policy. Then, Embrace offers additional coverage programs for things

like wellness care, alternative medicine coverage, dental care and prescription drug coverage, which the owner may select as desired.

In its third year of selling pet health insurance, Embrace now covers about 5,000 pets and is growing about 25 percent a year. The company pays benefits according to actual amounts billed by the veterinarian, not a predetermined schedule of charges. Its goal is to provide reimbursements within 15 working days. You can “back into” the process by starting with the premium you’d like to pay and then putting together a shopping cart of benefits you want for your dog within that specified premium amount.

Bennett suggests that veterinary care costs are rising about 7 percent a year. Still, less than 1 percent of pet parents in the U.S. carry pet health insurance, compared to the 25 percent of pet owners, and 60 percent of purebred dog owners, with health insurance for their pets in England. “Pet health insurance is a great financial management tool,” says Bennett.

Embrace Pet Insurance  
Mayfield Village, OH  
(800) 511-9172  
embracepetinsurance.com

#### ■ Pet Assure Corporation

“Simple” is the guiding philosophy at New Jersey-based Pet Assure Corporation, owned by Charles Nebenzahl. He purchased the company two years ago from its founder, who had been refused insurance reimbursement for his Labrador’s

hip dysplasia treatments because it was a genetically-based condition and therefore excluded from his policy. The founder channeled his frustration into creating Pet Assure, a type of financial protection from pet healthcare expenses that doesn’t deal in forms and paperwork, deductibles, co-pays, pre-existing conditions, medical care codes, pre-determined schedules of charges, or other complexities.

Pet Assure more closely resembles a discount club than an insurance company. It signs veterinarians up when the vets agree to provide a 25 percent discount on medical services to Pet Assure members. Pet owners pay an annual fee and receive a membership card to present at the time of veterinary treatment provided by an in-network provider.

Why would vets mark down their service charges for Pet Assure members? “Most costs are fixed, but the veterinary practice may not be filling all of its appointment slots,” says Nebenzahl. He says Pet Assure brings new clients who want to receive discounted services to participating veterinary practices.

Pet Assure members can plug their zip code into the company’s website and receive a list of participating vets in their area. Urban areas around Washington, DC; New York City; Miami; Los Angeles; and in New Jersey offer the broadest choice of Pet Assure in-network veterinary practices. Some veterinary practices extend the discount to adjunct services like boarding and grooming.

Most of the participating veterinary

practices are primary care clinics. “[Veterinary] specialty practices are busy and don’t need help to fill [appointment] slots,” Nebenzahl says. But specialty practices are where pet parents most often spend the big bucks and need the most financial assistance. “Our program is designed to pay for itself with routine veterinary care only,” Nebenzahl explains.

Pet Assure also offers a “simple” lost pet recovery option. No microchips, no fancy chip readers. Just a collar tag with an ID number that directs someone who has possession of your lost dog to contact Pet Assure by phone. Pet Assure will identify and locate the dog’s owner.

Pet Assure Corp.  
Lakewood, NJ  
(888) 789-7387  
petassure.com

#### ■ PetFirst Healthcare

Offering premiums unaffected by a dog’s age, breed, or location, PetFirst Healthcare provides “core” plans (Basic Plan) and “comprehensive” plans (Preferred and Preferred Plus Plans), depending on the breadth of coverage desired by the owner. The plans are renewable for the life of the dog as long as the policy is purchased before the dog’s 10th birthday. The plans have per incident maximum payouts and a \$50 deductible per incident for accident and illness claims. PetFirst provides a small discount, with coverage starting immediately upon adoption, for dogs rescued from shelters.

Bill Watson, Executive Director of the

## User Reviews on PetInsuranceReview.com Offer Perspective

Fans of retailing websites like Amazon.com (and many others) have become accustomed to receiving a certain amount of purchasing advice from their peers, in the form of a “user review.” There are also other sites that offer only reviews, with no products offered for sale by the site owner – although the sites are generally funded by advertising income and the sites themselves may be cluttered with ads.

Here’s a site that helpfully offers tons of the former (user reviews) and none of the latter (ads from competing insurance companies): Colorado-based Pet Insurance Review. The site (petinsurancereview.com) states that it is not owned or controlled by any pet insurance company and the user reviews “do not reflect the opinion of the operator of this website.”

Pet Insurance Review says its mission is to help pet owners make the best health insurance decisions based on pricing and benefits, and actual customer reviews. It accomplishes the first part by making it easy for an owner to get a quote and

information about the various companies from the companies themselves. If you click on “Get quotes,” and fill in some basic information about yourself and your dog (your zip code, your dog’s age, breed, and sex), the site will submit simultaneous quote requests to several insurance companies, who will then e-mail their quotes to you individually.

Alternatively, if you click on the names of the various insurance companies, you jump to a page that gives contact information for that company, a basic description (provided by the company), and hyperlink to the company’s own site (where you can submit a quote request yourself). But that page also features dozens (sometimes hundreds) of user reviews of the company’s insurance products; in our opinion, this is the most useful part of the website. Here, you can read what went well, or what went badly, about pet owners’ experiences with their dogs’ medical histories and their efforts to manage the associated costs.

Roanoke Valley SPCA in southwest Virginia, began offering a PetFirst Healthcare insurance policy to shelter dog adopters in 2006. Although the shelter's veterinarian carefully screens dogs available for adoption, and the shelter would never knowingly adopt out a sick animal, Watson says it's not always possible to know what an animal could be incubating.

"The worst calls I get," says Watson, "are when an adopter gets home and later calls to tell me their animal is sick. They don't always understand the communal nature of shelter living. I get a small number of these calls but they are highly emotional."

Now, the shelter offers adopters the option of purchasing a pet health insurance policy, which takes effect on the adoption day, for just \$5 for the first month's premium. The premiums revert to the regular rate after the first month.

Watson credits the shelter's constantly improving medical practices and the availability of affordable pet health insurance with reducing adoption returns for health reasons from 20 to 25 per year to three to five per year.

PetFirst Healthcare  
Jeffersonville, IN  
(866) 937-7387  
petfirsthealthcare.com

#### ■ PetHealth, Inc.

PetHealth, Inc., based in Ontario, offers a range of similar products and services for veterinarians, shelters, and pet owners through a number of wholly owned subsidiaries using a number of brand names including 24PetWatch, CherryBlue, EVE, PetPoint, and ShelterCare.

Pethealth offers a wide range of plans, from accident coverage only to full plans with accident and "double illness" coverage. It also offers a special "tenant" plan, for dogs who live with their owners in rental homes, and a plan for senior dogs, which covers the maladies that most commonly affect senior dogs.

Available in the U.S. (except in Alaska) this company guarantees acceptance regardless of the age or current health of the dog. It notes that premiums and coverage don't increase due to a pet aging. Owners can purchase extra coverage for hereditary conditions. Some plans even provide



**Without insurance to help defray the high cost of emergency care for a serious illness or accident, some owners feel forced euthanize their pets.**

temporary partial reimbursement for the purchase of special diets.

PetHealth, Inc.  
Buffalo, NY  
(800) 275-7387  
pethealthinc.com

#### ■ Petplan USA

Petplan USA claims to be the only pet health insurance company in the U.S. to cover hereditary diseases with no dollar or time limit per condition. The company covers injuries and illnesses for life; once your dog is insured, Petplan will cover any chronic conditions into your dog's old age as long as you continue to renew your policy each year without any break in coverage. It also covers some alternative therapies.

Petplan is endorsed by the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and offers a discount to its members.

Petplan USA  
Philadelphia, PA  
(866) 467-3875  
gopetplan.com

#### ■ Pets Best Insurance

Founded in 2005, Pets Best Insurance steers away from using benefit schedules by stating that everything is covered except the things specifically listed as an exclusion in the owner's policy. However, the exclusion list is lengthy and includes:

congenital conditions, pre-existing conditions, parasites, diseases preventable by vaccines, elective procedures, and dental care in the basic level plan.

Owners may purchase add-on coverage for some of the exclusions like annual teeth cleaning, spay/neuter, and vaccinations. As with most health insurance companies, rates are geography-based; however, Pets Best Insurance is unique in that its exclusion conditions are also based upon geography.

Pets Best Insurance  
Boise, ID  
(877) 738-7237  
petsbest.com

#### ■ PurinaCare

Launched in the spring of 2008, PurinaCare is a subsidiary of Nestle Purina Pet Care Company. Opting for a higher deductible lowers the cost of the policy, so

owners can obtain coverage for expensive veterinary procedures, such as treating a serious injury resulting from an accident or cancer treatment, at lower prices. PurinaCare has a schedule of waiting periods for coverage after an owner purchases a policy. For instance, the waiting period for plan coverage to kick in for accident coverage is 48 hours from policy purchase, for illness coverage it's 14 days, and for dental coverage it's one year. Pre-existing conditions are not covered in any of the plans.

PurinaCare  
San Antonio, TX  
(866) 787-7676  
purinacare.com

#### ■ Trupanion Pet Insurance

Offered in Canada for six years, Trupanion is newly available in the U.S. Trupanion is designed to cover "major veterinary cost you can't anticipate," rather than "expected veterinary costs." Plans are priced with a \$0 deductible, but owners can increase the deductible level in \$5 increments in order to lower their monthly premiums. The plan pays 90 percent of the veterinary bills and will not increase as the dog ages. The plans cover hereditary conditions except hip dysplasia.

Trupanion  
Lynnwood, WA  
(800) 569-7913  
trupanionpetinsurance.com

## ■ Veterinary Pet Insurance

In business since 1982, Veterinary Pet Insurance (VPI) is the oldest and largest pet health insurance company in the U.S. After the policyholder meets her deductible, VPI reimburses her based on VPI's predetermined benefit schedule of charges for veterinary services, or the actual invoice amount, whichever is less.

Ann Melchoir, a retired law enforcement professional and longtime dog and cat owner, purchased a health insurance policy for her pets from VPI about nine years ago. "I'd give them a solid B+," says Melchoir.

Melchoir's monthly premium, which covers two young dogs and two cats (one who is 15 years old), costs \$103 with a \$50 deductible per animal. She credits VPI with good phone assistance, reimbursements received within one month of her submission of a claim, and premiums that don't go up just because she filed a claim.

Melchoir added her Norfolk Terrier, Katie, to the policy in 2007 when the pup was nine weeks old. During Katie's first year, she incurred about \$1,690 in veterinary bills, accumulated in four separate incidents, plus Melchoir paid \$187 to VPI for Katie's first year premium. Melchoir received just \$466 in insurance reimbursements. But, she adds, "VPI lost a lot of money in the last five to six years of my Standard Poodle's life."

Melchoir lives in Potomac, Maryland, an upscale suburb of Washington, DC. She notes that the reimbursements usually cover less than half the charges she pays to vets in her expensive area of the country. Even so, she maintains the policy for her



**Complementary and alternative treatments, such as acupuncture and chiropractic, are becoming an integral part of more and more dogs' routine healthcare. Accordingly, some plans do help cover the cost of visits to holistic practitioners.**

pets. She can afford to pay for the treatments her pets require, but the insurance "takes the sting out of it."

"I'm willing to spend extra money for peace of mind," she says. "I insure my pets before they come in the door [to eliminate policy exclusions for pre-existing conditions]. I'm that kind of person. For those years when you have a really sick animal, it's worth it."

Veterinary Pet Insurance  
Brea, CA  
(888) 899-4874  
petinsurance.com

## Ask these questions first

All of these companies offer price quotes through their websites and/or over the phone. Once you have determined the type and level of coverage you want for your dog, and you have some price quotes in front of you, call the companies whose plans you are considering and ask the following (and get the answers in writing!).

- What are the age limits? Some companies require puppies to be at least eight weeks old before coverage starts. Others will not cover older dogs.
- What is your waiting period? How long after you purchase the policy will you have to wait before all of the benefits kick in?
- What are your exclusions for pre-existing health conditions? How do you determine what is pre-existing?
- Does the company exclude certain breeds, charge more for certain breeds, or exclude breed-related, genetic conditions from coverage?
- What are your coverage caps or ceilings? Do they apply per incident, per body system, per illness, per year, or over the dog's lifetime?
- How do you cover chronic or recurring

## AAHA Seal of Approval

The American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) established its Seal of Acceptance program to "help pet owners make educated decisions regarding quality pet care."

The AAHA's research has led the organization to believe that most pet parents can manage to pay for an unexpected veterinary bill of up to \$500, but would have difficulty with unplanned expenses that exceed that amount. To prevent what is sometimes referred to as "economic euthanasia" (when an owner asks the veterinarian to euthanize the animal, because she can't afford the recommended treatment), the AAHA strongly suggests that all owners carry a high-deductible policy (with a low premium) that would largely pay for an expensive, unplanned event. The AAHA doesn't analyze or approve any other type of insurance or wellness policies, and limits its "Seal of Acceptance" to pet health insurance companies who make high-deductible policies available to consumers. (As of this writing, the AAHA has awarded its Seal only to Trupanion and PurinaCare in the U.S., and Petsecure in Canada.)

illnesses? Does coverage continue for repeated treatment of the same condition?

- What triggers an increase in premiums? The dog's age, filing a claim, built-in annual increases?

- Does the policy pay benefits based on a pre-determined schedule of charges or on the actual vet bill you pay?

- What are my co-pay choices? What percentage of my cost will the policy pay? Will my co-pay amount increase as my dog ages? Will my co-pay increase if I visit an emergency or specialty veterinarian?

- What are my deductible choices? Are deductibles different for visits to primary care veterinarians than for treatment by emergency or specialty veterinarians?

- Can I change my policy before the renewal date? If I do so, will I be charged a fee for the change?

- Can I get a multi-pet discount?

- How long after filing a claim will I receive reimbursement?

- Exactly what is covered and not covered in the policy? Checkups, spay/neuter, accidents, alternative therapies, preventative care, prescription drugs, illness due to tainted food?

- Can I use my usual primary care and specialty veterinarians, or must I use an in-network provider to receive benefits?

## Things to keep in mind

Choosing health insurance can seem daunting, but if you really focus on your own needs, your dog's health, and your budget, you'll be able to determine what sort of plan has the most potential for saving you money in the long run. Consider these tips as you mull over your options:

- Consider combining a discount program (like Pet Assure) to pay help pay for routine healthcare, with a low-premium, high-deductible policy for catastrophic health events only. That way, you will receive a discount on regular veterinary

charges and some supplies and services, and still have coverage for high-cost, unplanned procedures.

- Alternatively, if you are very self-disciplined, create an interest-bearing savings account to be used for your dog's healthcare needs. Take a realistic look at how much you can afford to save; it may make sense to purchase a high-deductible, low cost policy to cover expensive emergencies, even if you are assiduous

## How to Keep Your Dog's Healthcare Costs Low

- Spay or neuter your dog.

- Provide regular preventative care to keep your dog healthy. Keep his teeth clean by brushing his teeth, and having them cleaned professionally as soon as this is needed. Take him to your primary care veterinarian for a checkup *every* year.

- Protect his mental and emotional health, too. Chronic stress can affect his immune system, and make him prone to physical illness.

- Control your dog's weight; and provide him with plenty of safe exercise.

- Prevent emergencies; don't let your dog roam unsupervised.

- Keep your dog's safety in mind. Use a canine seatbelt or put him in a crate that is securely fastened in your car. Don't subject him to conditions where he may become subject to heatstroke or frostbite.

- Feed your dog the best food you can afford. Change his diet if it seems to cause any sort of digestive, skin, or other type of problem.

about saving money to be used for routine veterinary expenses. Once the account contains enough savings to cover the high cost of emergency healthcare, you could safely discontinue the emergency policy.

- The American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) offers this suggestion: Ask your veterinarian (or, more likely, her front office manager) about her recommendation for insurance. Vets and their clinic managers are likely to have experience dealing with the company (and maybe even the

policy) you are considering. They may be able to warn you away from companies that fail to live up to their promises, and steer you toward companies that their clients have reported being very happy with.

- Owners with multiple pets may benefit most from discount plans health insurance to provide for even regular, planned veterinary expenses.

Remember, when your dog's veterinary care costs significantly exceed what the insurance company will reimburse – according to its schedule – it can feel as if it wasn't worth paying for the insurance.

No matter what plan you choose, it's incumbent on you to understand the policy thoroughly, and know how to follow the proper procedure for filing claims. A company may have very specific requirements that you must meet – turning in paperwork within a determined time period, for example – and refuse to reimburse you if you fail to meet each of its requirements.

You may also find that you have to pay scrupulous attention to the reimbursements and the accompanying explanations that you do receive, to make sure you fully understand what the company did and did not reimburse you for, and why. All insurance companies make mistakes, and if you don't pay attention, you may find that the mistakes all seem to favor the insurance company!

One owner I interviewed thought he would get more credit on his first claim, since he had paid premiums for many years without a claim; insurance doesn't work like that! Also, after scrutinizing the reimbursement codes, he found that he failed to get reimbursement for something that

should have been covered. He complained to the company, and was told how to submit more paperwork to correct the problem and receive greater reimbursement, but felt it was too much work for too little return. Just as with their own health insurance, dog owners may have to be diligent and persistent to receive the full measure of what they are due. 🐾

*Lorie Long runs her two Border Terriers in agility and is the author of A Dog Who's Always Welcome (Howell Books, 2008).*

# Doggie Paddlers

*Swimming is the “perfect exercise” for you and your dog.*

BY SUSAN SARUBIN

For those of us who regularly swim for fitness, we know why swimming is often referred to as “the perfect exercise.” In addition to the physical benefits shared with other forms of aerobic exercise, swimming offers some unique benefits. It eliminates the effects of weight-bearing on the joints, exercises the entire body – upper *and* lower – at the same time, and, in most cases, is something we can do for our entire lives, even if age precludes us from taking part in other forms of exercise.

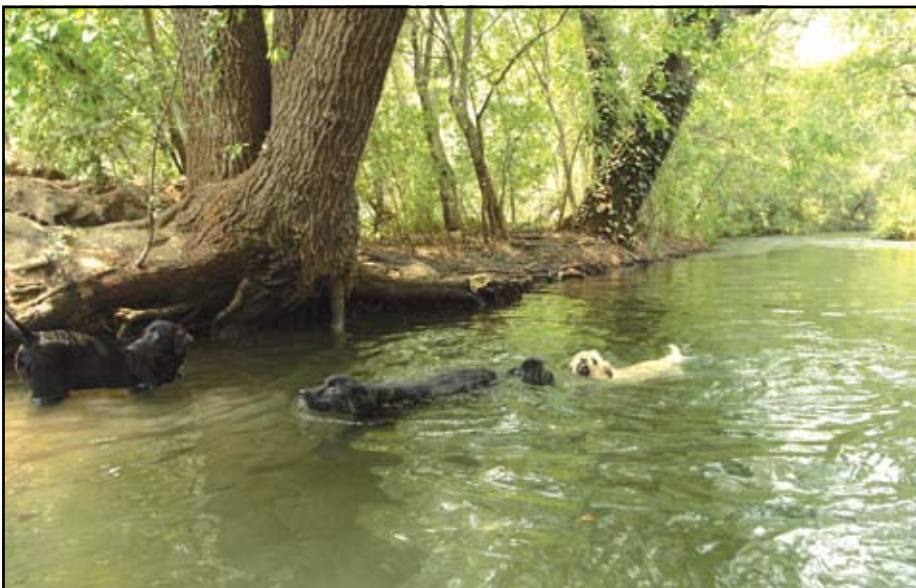
The physical benefits of swimming are the same for your canine companion as they are for you – that is, if you have a dog who will swim. Even though they actually have a stroke named after them, the notion that all dogs are “natural swimmers” is an erroneous one.

Some breeds were developed to work in water and are more physically adapted for swimming than others. The problem here is not getting these dogs *into* the water, but keeping them on terra firma when we want

them to stay clean and dry. However, occasionally, even a water breed shows disdain for water – yes, there are some Labrador Retrievers who hate swimming.

Conversely, there are dogs you’d never imagine taking kindly to the water who become devoted and skilled swimmers. Although not blessed with the physical advantages of a water breed, and despite sinking rear ends or heavy, wet coats, these Boston Terriers, Rhodesian Ridgebacks, and Siberian Huskies have learned to enjoy swimming. They don’t know or care that they have to work a little harder than a Poodle, Cocker Spaniel, or a Newfoundland – they just want to have fun!

Some dogs may simply not like the sensation of being in water. But many dogs fear the water for precisely the same reason that many humans do: they don’t know how to swim! But suppose you could help your dog overcome his dislike, or fear, of water by *teaching* him how to swim? Think of the years of fun ahead for your dog if he learns to *love* the water. It’s also a skill



**Big, little, purebred, mixed . . . you never know which individuals will enjoy swimming and which ones won’t. Don’t push a reluctant dog to swim, but watch an enthusiastic one to make sure he doesn’t get exhausted or hypothermic.**

## What you can do . . .

- Go slow when introducing your dog to this new sport. Use praise, toys, and treats to help him feel comfortable and happy near and in the water.
- Make safety a priority. Observe your dog closely and keep him close to you. Fit him with a canine life jacket if he needs extra help when learning to swim, or when swimming in moving water.
- Rinse your dog with fresh water after he swims in chlorinated, salty, or dirty water.
- Respect your dog’s feelings. If you are able to teach your dog to swim but he clearly does not enjoy the water, sign him up for a different sport.



that may come in handy someday when you need to rehabilitate an injury your dog has sustained, or when joint disease makes weight-bearing exercise too painful. And if you live near or on the water, or own a pool, teaching your dog to swim becomes a matter of safety.

## Swimming lessons

We know that introducing a young puppy to all sorts of novel stimuli is important in developing a well adapted, socialized adult dog. Puppies between the ages of roughly 6 to 16 weeks more easily overcome fears of new objects, people, and situations than will older puppies and dogs.

Exposure to water is no exception. If

you have a young puppy, take advantage of this period to get your puppy used to the water and to teach him to swim. If you have an older puppy or adult dog, even one who already has shown a dislike for the water, you may still be able to teach your dog to swim and enjoy it. It just may take a little longer. Some dogs take to swimming almost immediately. Others may take weeks before they feel confident.

There is no faster way to make a dog fear water than to drop him into it. Believing all dogs are “natural swimmers,” there are people who try to teach their dogs to swim by doing exactly this. *Never* drop your dog into water; it is cruel and may quickly end his swimming career before it starts. You will want to accompany your dog into the water to teach him to swim, so dress accordingly – anything from bare feet and rolled-up pants to a bikini will work!

Expose your dog gradually to water, whether a pool, stream, pond, lake, or the ocean. The focus of your training is to teach your dog to *enjoy* being in water. To make the experience as positive as possible, be sure the conditions are optimal – a warm day, warmer water temperature, shallow entry to the water, and little distraction.

Pond or lake shorelines are ideal for getting your dog accustomed to being near the water. Walk slowly along the shoreline with your dog on-leash. If he is clearly uncomfortable with your proximity to the water, move a bit farther away. Praise your dog as he walks with you, feeding him treats that are especially yummy, or coaxing him and rewarding him with a coveted toy (preferably one that is waterproof and floats).

### **Advance only when ready**

When he is clearly comfortable walking along the shoreline at a distance from the water, try walking a little closer to the water. Continue to praise him lavishly and reward him the treats or a toy. When your dog progresses to moving closer to the water with no signs of anxiety, try continuing your stroll at the water’s edge. Walk in an inch or two of water and allow your dog to get his feet wet. Make a fuss over his bravery.

Unless your dog shows an interest in wading into deeper water on his own, this



**Use a toy or treats to help your dog become enthusiastic about and comfortable in shallow water, before taking him into deep water that requires swim strokes.**

is a good place to stop training for the day. End on a positive note. If you are successful in helping your dog feel comfortable just being *close* to the water, you’ve had a good first day of training. Your dog is beginning to learn that good, fun things happen around the water!

Your next step is to encourage your dog, with treats or a toy, into venturing a little deeper. Continue to walk, play, praise, and treat, gradually increasing the depth of the water to no higher than your dog’s belly. Watch closely for any signs of anxiety, and if present, return to a depth where your dog is having fun and is relaxed and comfortable.

Once your dog is comfortable in water that is up to his belly, it is time to begin the real swimming lesson. Place your hands underneath your dog’s midsection and hindquarters for support, suspend him in the water and move him slowly forward into deeper water for a foot or two. He should soon start paddling as you support him and move him through the water. His stroke technique won’t be pretty at first – he may claw the air above the water with his front paws and barely move his hind legs – but with repetition, his form will improve.

Relax and speak calmly and happily to your dog while moving him through the water. Return him to where he was standing previously – and praise and reward him. You may even move him *toward* his favorite floating toy and allow him to snatch it up as a reward.

### **Up a creek with a paddle**

When your dog is paddling gracefully with

his front paws as well as with his hindquarters, it’s time to have your dog try to swim on his own. Encourage your dog to swim to you for a short distance in water that is a little over his head. Use a treat or a toy to lure him and reward him. See if he will swim back in on his own as well, with you leading the way. If he is not ready to swim on his own, spend more time getting him comfortable paddling with your hands supporting him.

As your dog becomes accustomed to swimming on his own for short distances, you may try tossing his toy out a little farther, or calling him to you from farther away.

Keep your dog on-leash during the training in case he gets distracted or confused and has difficulty reaching shore. A harness on your dog is preferable to a collar for attaching the leash. If you have to help your dog reach the shore by gently pulling on the leash, using a harness will prevent stress on your dog’s neck and will not interfere with his ability to hold his head above water. Use a longer leash or nylon line for safety as your dog swims for increasing distances, adjusting the slack as he swims so he doesn’t become entangled.

For the occasional inexperienced but confident puppy or dog you may be able to shorten the swim training process. Introduce your dog to the water by bringing along a canine friend who already swims. Your dog may very well follow his friend into the water and even attempt to swim on his own. Just be prepared to help if your brave dog exceeds his abilities. Keep him on a leash or line, and be close by in case he needs you to support him while he perfects his doggie paddle.

If you are training your dog to swim in a pool, the process is the same. Train gradually around the pool, at the pool’s edge, on the first step or ramp into the pool, then slowly progress to moving him into the water while supporting him with your hands.

Swimming uses a lot of energy and is especially tiring until swimming-specific endurance builds. Keep your training sessions short at first, gradually increasing duration.

With practice, your dog will soon be swimming longer distances with ease. When your dog is swimming regularly

for exercise, remember to have him take breaks often. Dogs who love to swim will swim to exhaustion, risking hyperthermia and drowning. Always supervise your dog's swim sessions and be prepared to help if he finds himself in trouble.

## Where to swim

Rivers are dangerous places to allow your dog to swim because of the underlying currents in moving water. But swimming pools, lakes, ponds, creeks, and the ocean can all be great places for dogs to swim. Each venue comes with its own list of safety hazards and precautions to insure that your dog survives his water adventures healthy and happy.

### ■ Swimming pools

- If you have a backyard swimming pool, have it securely fenced in to keep your dog (as well as children) out of the pool when you are not actively supervising.
- If your pool is covered when not in use, firmly secure the cover to prevent your dog from slipping underneath.
- Alarm systems are available that alert when the surface of the water in your pool is broken. Or you can get an alarm that attaches to your dog's collar and alerts

when submerged. (See "Resources," page 24, for contact information for these and other products mentioned in this article.)

- Your pool should have a ramp or graduated steps for your dog to be able to exit the water. Dogs cannot use ladders! If your pool has no usable exit for your dog, install an escape tool for pets, such as a Skamper-Ramp. *Teach* your dog where to exit the pool. If your dog falls in the pool and cannot get out, he will eventually tire of paddling and drown.

- If your pool is chlorinated, hose off or bathe your dog after he swims. Chlorine can dry his coat and skin and make him sick if he licks himself. Don't allow your dog to drink the chlorinated pool water; keep a bowl of fresh water poolside.

- Don't have your own pool? If the idea of your dog swimming in a clean, confined, safe area appeals to you, check to see if there are any indoor doggie swimming pools or pet therapy pools in your area. You may be able to pay by the hour for use of the pool for one or multiple dogs.

If you live in a colder climate, indoor swimming is an option for continuing your dog's favorite activity in the cold winter months. These pools are kept fairly warm (75 degrees or more), making the water

more comfortable for older dogs and tentative new swimmers.

### ■ Lakes and ponds

- Even the most skilled canine swimmers may become distracted or confused and get lost in a larger body of water. Outfit your dog with a pet flotation device, keep her in your sights at all times, and be prepared to enter the water and help her if needed. Attaching a long leash or line to your dog will always keep you connected.

- Blue-green algae in ponds and lakes is toxic if ingested. An overgrowth of blue-green algae causes the water to appear cloudy with a blue-green hue. Avoid water that is contaminated with blue-green algae; if you suspect that your dog has had contact with or swallowed contaminated water, call your vet *immediately*.

- Although not all types of algae are toxic to dogs, ponds and lakes in many parks, subdivisions, and golf courses are treated with chemicals to prevent excessive algae growth. Some of these chemicals cause only skin irritation, but others may cause liver damage or neurological damage. Check with the appropriate sources to find out if chemicals are used to treat the water. Call your vet immediately if you suspect

## Jake's Escape from Alcatraz

On July 30, 2005, Jake, a four-year-old Golden Retriever owned by Jeff Pokonosky of San Diego, made canine history. Jake, Jeff, and more than 500 other human swimmers jumped off a boat into the cold and choppy waters of the San Francisco Bay for the South End Rowing Club's tenth annual "Alcatraz Invitational" swim. Jake completed the 1.2-mile swim to the San Francisco shoreline in a little under 42 minutes – good enough for 72<sup>nd</sup> place overall, much to the dismay of the many serious human swimmers behind him. Doggie paddling his way into the record book, Jake had the same medal placed around his neck as his human counterparts received.

"I adopted Jake from the Golden Rescue Club of Greater Los Angeles in 2002," explains Pokonosky. At the time Jake was a year and a half old. "Being an avid ocean swimmer, I wanted to teach Jake to swim well so we could swim side-by-side in the ocean. Initially, Jake was not a very good swimmer, but, after four weeks of careful training Jake became a strong and efficient swimmer. His primary motivation was human companionship and a tennis ball. After two years of swimming together, Jake, who stands



PHOTO COURTESY OF JEFF POKONOSKY

25 inches tall with 65 pounds of sheer muscle, had a training schedule of two-mile ocean swims twice per week. Jake is a world-class swimmer and has touched the hearts of many with his amazing story."



chemical poisoning in your dog from swimming in a chemically contaminated lake or pond.

- Lakes and ponds in rural areas may contain herbicides, pesticides, or fertilizers from drainage run-off from local farms. Lakes that allow motor boating may have higher concentrations of petroleum products. Always rinse your dog after swimming in lakes and ponds, and watch for any signs of illness or toxicity.

- While nearly impossible to prevent your dog from drinking the water in his favorite freshwater swimming hole, provide clean water and encourage your dog to drink it. Drinking water from ponds, lakes and streams can lead to an infection of giardia, an intestinal parasite that can cause serious illness.

- If you live in, or are traveling to, a state where alligators live, be aware that they do attack and kill dogs. Keep your dog away from all lakes, ponds, rivers, marshes, wetlands, and swamps. A pool may be your dog's only option (and you may even want to make sure the pool is reptile-free!).

- Beware of conditions that may injure your dog or put his life at risk. Look for broken glass on the shoreline. Fallen tree limbs in the water that may catch on your dog's harness or flotation device. Old fishing line underwater may wrap around your dog's leg. Keep your dog in your vision. If conditions such as water temperature, depth, or distance to your swimming dog would prevent you from safely entering the water to help your dog if needed, you should not allow your dog to swim.

### ■ The ocean

- While many dogs enjoy a romp in the surf at a dog-friendly beach, large waves can knock your dog over and strong tides and undercurrents can pull him under. Or your dog may be so focused on retrieving his drifting ball that he swims out beyond his limits. A doggie life jacket is essential when swimming in the ocean. Attaching a long lead to your dog may prevent you having to swim out after him if he is pulled out to sea.

- Check the water for sea lice and jellyfish. Sea lice can cause red, itchy bumps on your dog's skin. Jellyfish sting!

## Canine Hydrotherapy

The physical benefits of moving in water have been known for centuries. Buoyancy in water lessens stress on the joints and allows freer movement with greater range of motion. Canine hydrotherapy is used for a variety of conditions including arthritis, paralysis, post-surgical rehabilitation, injury rehabilitation, and elbow or hip dysplasia. It is also used to help increase fitness and muscle tone, especially in geriatric dogs, or for obesity, and to help with balance and coordination.



**Laurie Williams works with Tucker in a hydrotherapy pool at her training and rehab facility, Pup 'n Iron, Fredericksburg, VA.**

The healing potential of being immersed in water may also have a profound effect on the emotional body as well. Soothing, warm water is relaxing and creates a sense of well-being. A dog who is getting older and losing mobility, or a dog who is recovering from surgery, may show an increasing lack of confidence, or fear associated with pain. Swimming in warm water can help alleviate these stressors, improving your dog's emotional state as well as his physical being.

To find out more about canine hydrotherapy, or to find a pool or therapist in your area, visit the Association of Canine Water Therapy (ACWT) website at [caninewatertherapy.com/therapy.html](http://caninewatertherapy.com/therapy.html).

- Discourage your dog from drinking seawater; it will make him sick. Offer fresh water to him frequently.

- Salt and other minerals in seawater may damage your dog's coat and irritate his skin. Rinse him off when you leave the beach.

- Keep your dog away from any dead fish or shellfish that have washed ashore.

- Check your dog's paws for irritation or burning from hot sand on the beach.

### ■ Anywhere

- Be sure your dog has a shady place to rest and plenty of fresh water to drink.

- Dogs can sunburn, especially short-haired, pink-skinned dogs. Apply sunscreen made for dogs to ears and nose. Avoid prolonged exposure to the sun between the hours of 10 a.m. and 3 p.m.

- Heatstroke is also a risk. Familiarize yourself with the symptoms (see "Running with Your Dog," WDJ February 2009) and take preventive measures; limit your dog's

activity in warmer temperatures and direct exposure to the sun.

- Train your dog to "Come" on cue, even in the water. This may prevent him from swimming too far after a duck or his toy, and you from having to come to his aid.

- Clean and dry your dog's ears after a swim. While especially important after swimming in dirty lakes and ponds, water retained in the ear creates a hospitable environment for bacteria and yeast to grow, no matter where your dog has been swimming.

- Watch for signs that your dog is tiring. Swimming is a strenuous activity and endurance is achieved slowly. Remember that older dogs, even experienced swimmers, no longer have the strength, agility or endurance that they once had. A tired dog is a good dog on land, but in the water, a tired dog is a dog in big trouble.

- Learn how to take care of your dog if injured when swimming. Organizations that offer courses in Pet CPR and First Aid include the American Red Cross and the American Safety & Health Institute.



**Not all dogs can swim alongside people – much less children – without scaring or scratching them in the water. But some avid canine swimmers are considerate and even protective exercise companions in the water.**

### Swimming with your dog

Perhaps you're interested in having your dog swim alongside you so you can work out together. Most people just supervise their dogs when swimming, or wade with them in shallow water. But some folks have their dogs accompany them on swims, and with proper training and conditioning, some dogs progress to swimming long distances with their owners.

My first experience of swimming alongside a dog was many years ago with my Lab, Max. He was so focused on retrieving his ball or stick that he barely paid attention to my presence in the water. He could not have cared less about swimming alongside me; if there wasn't an object thrown for him to retrieve, or a duck or boat to chase, what was the point of swimming? So *I* swam alongside *him* on his retrievals.

Not every dog who swims will swim alongside you willingly. If your dog follows you as you move through the water, that's a good first step. If he swims to you and claws at you, you have a problem. Try training with a cue such as "Leave it" or "Off" that will let him know not to make physical contact with you. Practice in shallow water at first, with your dog wading beside you, and gradually progress to deeper water where he must swim but you can still walk. Eventually, if you can get him to swim alongside you without contact, slowly increase the distance and duration of your swims. If you breathe to one side when you swim, make sure your dog is always on your breathing side so he remains in your sight.

### Landlubbers

My next "swimming" dog was my first Ridgeback, Kimba. I respected his dislike for water after many attempts to acclimate him. But if I would dive off the dock into the lake he would howl and hurl his body into the water after me, seemingly panicked that I was in danger. His stroke consisted of clawing the sky in a frenzy while moving toward me. If I didn't swim away from him fast enough, my 95-pound personal canine lifeguard would claw me, leaving me bruised and bloodied. I quickly learned to leave him inside when I went for a dip.

So despite your attempts to create a positive association with water, what if your dog would rather have you cut into the quick of a toenail than to venture near the pool or get within sight of the ocean? It's time to throw in the beach towel and respect your dog's feelings. Some dogs who don't take to swimming still enjoy wading and splashing in a kiddie pool or running through a sprinkler to cool off. Even if you are able to teach your dog to swim but he is clearly not enjoying himself, abandon your goal of creating a canine Michael Phelps. Take your dog out for walk, run, or a rigorous game of fetch, and just enjoy being active together. 🐾

*Susan Sarubin lives, swims, bikes, runs, and trains dogs in Baltimore, Maryland. Her training business is Pawsitive Fit, LLC. Susan is also the Maryland State Coordinator for Rhodesian Ridgeback Rescue, Inc. See her website at pawsitivefit.com for more information.*

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# Wait Training

*Teach your dog “wait” and “stay” – and how to tell the difference.*

BY PAT MILLER

**R**ecently, I was struck by the realization that while “Wait!” is one of the most valuable cues I use with my dogs, it’s a behavior we didn’t usually teach in old-fashioned choke-chain obedience classes. Oh, we taught rock-solid obedience ring “Stays.” Some trainers substituted the word “wait” for “stay” to differentiate between recalls (“wait” means you’re going to get up and come to me when I call you) and the one-minute and three-minute sit-and-down-stays (stay means you are never to move no matter what happens until I come back to release you). Generally, though, we didn’t use “Wait” to mean “pause” as many of us dog owners do today. “Wait” is a valuable cue; I’d be lost without it.

Of course, a cue takes on whatever meaning you give to it when you teach your dog a new word or hand signal. We tend to use words that are meaningful to

us (they are much easier to remember!) but if you wanted, you could teach your dog that “Banana!” means sit, “Orange” means down, “Pumpkin” means stay, and “Kiwi” means wait. As long as you teach your dog what behavior you want him to associate with your words and use them consistently, your dog will learn the meaning you’ve assigned to them and the cues will work for you.

Given that most trainers are well aware of this, it might surprise you to discover the intensity with which trainers sometimes debate the meaning of the cues “wait” and “stay.” The whole debate is silly; our cues mean whatever we teach our dogs they mean. I’ll explain how I use (and train) the wait and stay cues. Regardless of the words you choose to use and how you choose to use them, I hope you’ll discover the immense value of distinguishing between the wait and stay behaviors.

## Wait a bit, stay a while

I teach that “Wait!” means pause. If I’m leaving the house, I have my dogs sit and wait at the door as I leave. No door darters here! They know that as soon as the door closes they are free to run around the house doing acceptable doggie things. Mostly they go lie down, after a few barks from Lucy the Corgi and Missy the Aussie, who are both routinely a little stressed about being left behind. I teach that “Stay!” means “stay in the exact position I left you in until I return to your side and release you” – the standard obedience competition-style stay.

I use “wait” everywhere. I hardly ever use “stay.” If some, but not all, of our dogs are coming with me, I might ask two to wait while I invite the other two to move through the door. (Body blocking is useful for this maneuver.) All my dogs sit and wait for their food bowls – an



**Start with your dog in a sit. Hold a food bowl in front of your chest and say “Wait!” Pat Miller suggests that this exercise works better if the dog is positioned perpendicular to you, rather than sitting in front on you.**



**If your dog starts to get up as you lower the bowl, say “Oops!” and lift the bowl to your chest again. Ask your dog to sit again. If she gets up again on the next try, only lower the bowl an inch or two before giving her a click and treat.**



**She should quickly realize that the only way to get the click, treat, and opportunity to eat out of the bowl is to hold her sit until you give the release cue. Doing this twice a day at mealtimes is a vital part of a “say please” program.**

## What you can do . . .

- Teach your dog to “Wait” and use the behavior consistently as part of your “say please” program (sit and wait for your food bowl) and to keep your dog safe (wait at doorways and getting out of cars).
- Teach your dog to “Stay” and use the behavior when you need to park your dog more solidly (for photo portraits, training class, obedience competition?), when you need her to stay in position for a discrete period.
- Practice frequently, in short sessions. Set up the exercise so it’s easy for her to succeed. “Wait” and “stay” should indicate that your dog has an opportunity to earn something rewarding – not be a bore.



excellent good manners behavior and an important part of a “say please” program. This reminds them that it’s my food – the leader controls all the good stuff – and I’m sharing it with them out of the goodness of my benevolent-leader heart.

My dogs “wait” if they’re getting in or out of the car. They “wait” if we’re walking off-leash and they’re getting too far ahead of me on the path. They “wait” if they’re asking to hop up on the sofa or the bed and I don’t want them up yet. They “wait” on the stair landing so I can safely walk down the stairs without tripping over a jumble of dogs.

I teach my dogs the “wait” behavior using both food bowls and doors. In my basic adult and puppy good manners classes, I teach “wait” using food bowls only (we just don’t have enough doors to go around), and save “stay” for my upper level classes. While the stay behavior certainly has value, most dog owners mean “pause” when they say “stay,” rather than “stay in the exact position I left you in until I return and release you.” I want them to learn the difference between the two behaviors early on, and teach their dogs the easier, more useful one first.

## Food bowl waits

The easiest way to teach “wait” is to help your dog succeed by shaping the behavior in small steps. Any time your dog stops succeeding, you’ve made the steps too big, or tried to take too many steps too quickly. Always seek to find the place where your dog wins and move forward from that place in tiny steps. (See “The Shape of Things to Come,” WDJ March 2006.)

Note: If your dog guards her food bowl aggressively, don’t teach this exercise until you have successfully modified the resource-guarding behavior. (See “Thanks for Sharing,” September 2001.)

With your dog sitting perpendicular to you, hold a bowl of your dog’s food at your chest level and tell her to “wait.” Move the food bowl (with food in it, topped with tasty treats) about 4 to 6 inches toward the floor. If your dog stays sitting, click your clicker (or use a verbal marker such as “Yes!” or a tongue click) and feed her a treat from the bowl.

If your dog gets up, cheerfully say “Oops!” and raise the bowl back up, and ask her to sit again. Your “Oops!” is what’s known as a “no-reward marker.” It lets your dog know that getting up from the sit makes the food bowl go away.

If she remains sitting, lower the bowl 4 to 6 inches again. Click and give her a treat if she’s still sitting.

If she gets up a second time, say “Oops!” and raise the bowl, and then have her sit. On your next try, only lower the bowl an inch or two. Click and treat for each success.

Repeat this step several times until your dog consistently remains sitting as you lower the bowl. Gradually move the bowl closer to the floor with succeeding repetitions until you can place it on the floor two feet away from your dog without her trying to get up or eat it. After each repetition, stand up straight and raise the bowl all the way back up.

Finally, place the bowl on the floor and give your dog permission to eat. After she has had a few bites, lift the bowl up and try again.

Repeat these steps, alternating between picking up the bowl before she eats and giving her permission to eat, until you can consistently place the bowl on the floor and she doesn’t move until you tell her she can. One of the great things about “food bowl waits” is that if you feed your dog twice a day, you already have two natural training sessions built into your schedule!

## Wait at the door

With your dog sitting at your side in front of a door, tell her to “wait.” (It works best if you use a door that opens away from you; if the door opens in, it’s much harder to use it to block the dog if she starts to go out, especially once you’re past the “open it a crack” stage.) Move your hand a few inches toward the doorknob. If your dog doesn’t move, click your clicker or use your verbal marker, and feed her a tasty treat. Repeat this step several times, moving your hand closer toward the doorknob in small increments, clicking and giving her a treat each time she stays sitting.

Remember that you’re shaping the behavior in tiny steps. If she gets up, say “Oops!” and have her sit, then try again. If she gets up two or three times in a row, you’re advancing too quickly; go back to moving your hand only a few inches toward the knob, and make your increments even smaller.

When she’ll stay sitting as you move your hand toward the door, try actually touching the knob. Click and give her a treat if she stays in place. Then jiggle the door knob. Click and reward her for not moving. Repeat several times, clicking and giving her a treat each time, before slowly opening the door a crack.

If your dog doesn’t move, click and



**The “wait at the door” exercise works best in front of a door that opens away from you; you can easily close it if your dog tries to exit. Though entry doors usually open in, screen and or storm doors (which open out) can be used.**

treat. If she does get up, say “Oops!” and close the door. You’re teaching her that getting up makes the door close – if she wants the possible opportunity to go out, she needs to keep sitting.

Gradually open the door a bit more, an inch or two at a time. Any time she gets up, say “Oops!” and close the door, and try again. If you get two or three “oopses” in a row you’re doing too much; back up a few steps and progress more slowly. Click and reward her for not moving, several times at each step. When you can open the door all the way, take one step through it, stop, turn around and face your dog. Wait a few seconds, click, then return to your dog and give her a food reward.

When she’s really solid with you walking out the door, you can sometimes invite her to go out the door ahead of you, with you or after you – her “real life reward” – and sometimes walk through and close the door, leaving her inside as you would if you were leaving for work. Once the door has closed, she’s free to get up and move around.

One of the wonderful things about the “wait” cue is that dogs do seem to generalize it pretty easily. If you teach it at a door in your home, they’ll understand pretty quickly when you ask them to “Wait!” when you open the car door – a great safety behavior so your dog doesn’t jump out on the highway if you have to get out of the car on the side of the road to change a flat tire.

Once you’ve taught “wait” with the food bowl and door, try it on an on-leash walk. If your dog starts to move too far out in front of you, say “Wait!” If she doesn’t pause of her own accord, stop moving and the leash will stop her (don’t jerk her to a stop!). A few repetitions of this and she’ll figure it out in no time.

## Teaching stay

I really don’t use the formal stay very much. In fact, the only times I’ve asked any of my dogs to stay in the past two months were for a family dog-group photo and in a training class.

I teach “stay” as a much more precisely defined behavior than “wait.” It means, “Stay in the exact position I left you in, until I return to you and release you from the stay.”

There are three components to this behavior: duration, distraction, and distance. You will need to teach those three elements – the “three Ds” – separately.

■ **Duration:** Your dog will stay for however long you ask. Naturally, this is a shaped behavior – you’ll start with duration of a few seconds and gradually work your way up to longer and longer stays.

■ **Distraction:** Your dog will stay even if there are lots of fun and exciting things going on around her. Again, you shape this by starting with small distractions and moving up to bigger and better ones.

■ **Distance:** Your dog will stay even if you are very far away from her. It should be no surprise that you shape this one, too. Move away a very small distance and work up to longer distances.

Before you begin, decide what your “release” cue will be. This will be the word you use to tell your dog the stay is over and she must get up. A lot of trainers use the word “okay,” and like so many other things in dog training, there is disagreement over its use. Some argue that “okay” is used so much in conversation that your dog is likely to be released from a stay by accident. Other commonly used release words include “release,” “break,” “all done,” and “free” or “free dog.” I’ve used “okay” for more than 30 years and have yet to accidentally release my dog from a stay.

## Duration of time

Of necessity, you must start with the duration piece of the “three Ds.” You can’t work on distance and distraction until your dog will stay for a reasonably extended period of time (30 to 60 seconds, minimum). Ask your dog to sit facing you. Wait a second or two, click, treat, and release. Be sure to deliver the treat directly to her mouth, at nose level, so she doesn’t jump up to get it before you release her!

If she gets up before you can click, say “Oops!” and whisk the treat behind your back and ask her to sit again. Repeat this step until she realizes that getting up makes the treat disappear.

Ask her to sit again. If necessary, hold a treat at your chest, or even let her nibble on it right in front of her nose, to keep her sitting until you can click. When you know she’ll stay for at least two seconds, you can begin to say “Stay!” after you’ve asked her to sit, and before you click, treat, and release.

You can also use a hand prompt for the stay, if you wish, by holding out your hand

with your palm toward your dog’s nose. If you do this, resist the temptation to hold your hand out for the entire stay – your dog will become dependent on your hand to maintain the stay behavior and it will be hard to “fade” it later.

Gradually shape for longer stays by extending the length of time you have her sit before you release her. As soon as you can, fade the use of the treat to keep her sitting. When she’ll stay for more than a few seconds, you can click and treat several times during the stay, so she understands that the click of the clicker doesn’t mean “release.” At first I repeat the stay cue after I click and treat, to help my dog succeed. Over time, I fade the use of the additional stay cues and the hand prompt.

I mentioned that the release cue means your dog must get up. This is the only way you know for sure she understands that she was released from the stay. If you use it to mean “You can get up if you want but you don’t have to,” you won’t know for sure if she heard or understood the release. If you make sure she gets up after the release, you’ll know she’s getting it.

## Purposeful distractions

I like to add distractions before I add distance, just in case distractions happen incidentally when I’ve moved away from my dog. To shape the distraction component, start small:

- Move one arm slightly. Click and treat.
- Move that arm a little more. Click and treat.
- Move both arms a little. Click and treat.
- Move both arms a little more. Click and treat.
- Hop once. Click and treat.
- Hop twice. Click and treat.
- Hop several times. Click and treat.
- Hop while moving your arms. Click and treat.
- Jog in place. Click and treat.
- Jog in place while moving your arms. Click and treat.

- Have a person walk by. Click and treat.
- Have a person walk by tossing a ball in the air. Click and treat.
- Have a person walk by bouncing a ball. Click and treat.
- Have a person jog by. Click and treat.
- Have a person walk by with another dog on leash. Click and treat.

The possibilities are endless!

Remember that a click and treat is not a release. When I first add distractions I will do one small movement, pause, click, and release, then gradually increase the number and intensity of distractions. As you add more distractions, remember to release your dog frequently so she succeeds. If you get two or more stay “mistakes” in a row, you’re asking for too much. If she makes a mistake, use the “Oops!” no-reward marker, then back up, slow down, and help your dog win.

## Getting distant

Adding distance is the ultimate goal of training the stay behavior: to be able to walk away from your dog and leave her in a solid stay. We add distance last because the stay needs to be solid before you leave your dog, to maximize your likelihood of

success. Again, add distance in small steps, to help your dog succeed.

I start with a half-step back, click, return to my starting position, and treat. Each time you leave your dog you’ll click when you’re away – sending your dog the message that she’s getting rewarded for staying when you’re a distance from her, but return all the way to her to deliver the treat, so you don’t inadvertently lure her out of position. One step at a time, move farther and farther away, move to the side, move behind her, until she’ll stay wherever you are. Then begin adding duration and distractions as well as distance, and you’re done! Almost.

The final step to a really solid stay is “stay with human out of sight.” The most common use of this behavior is for upper-level obedience competition – the Open Class in AKC obedience includes a three-minute out-of-sight sit-stay and a five-minute out-of-sight down-stay. Few owners expect their dogs to stay frozen in place in the real world while they go shopping, if for no other reason than the safety risk. Leaving a dog tied in public outside a store is risky, to say nothing of the huge risk of leaving them untethered and out of your sight.

To teach an out-of-sight stay, go back to shaping. Your dog is already solid on distance, distraction, and duration. As you practice your stays, occasionally step through the doorway and out of sight for

a second, and return before your dog has time to realize you’re gone. Click, return, and treat. As you gradually increase the time you’re out of the room, you can set up a mirror at an angle that will let you observe the dog in your absence, so you don’t click while she’s making a mistake. Be careful – if your dog learns that she can watch you in the mirror, it will defeat the purpose of being out of sight.

## Wait is most useful

If I could only teach my dogs one of these behaviors, I’d choose “wait.” My assistant, Shirley, recently adopted a young Siberian Husky that she was fostering for the shelter in order to modify the pup’s resource-guarding behavior. Shirley brings Myah to work with her, and because people come and go all day, she has lots of opportunities to use the Wait cue, to remind Myah not to exit the office as people enter and leave. Shirley mentioned to me the other day that “Wait” was the most useful cue she’d taught her dog. I have to agree. 🐾

*Pat Miller, CPDT, is WDJ’s Training Editor. Miller lives in Hagerstown, Maryland, site of her Peaceable Paws training center. Pat is also author of The Power of Positive Dog Training; Positive Perspectives: Love Your Dog, Train Your Dog; Positive Perspectives II: Know Your Dog, Train Your Dog; and Play with Your Dog. See page 24 for more information.*

## Sit Means Stay?

Some trainers insist that a “Stay” cue is redundant. They teach their dogs that the sit cue means “Sit and stay sitting until I tell you to do something else.” If they tell a dog to “Down” it means “Lie down and stay down until I tell you to do something else.” Same with “Stand” or any other position cue.

One of the many things I love about positive training is that we now accept that there are many different (positive) ways to train. So yes, it is certainly possible to eliminate the “Stay” cue by teaching the dog that a position cue means to hold that position until

I tell you to get up. I fully understand and respect the trainers who do it that way. More power to them – and I choose not to.



Thanks to Sandi Thompson, of Bravo! Dog Training, in Berkeley, CA, for demonstrating these techniques. See contact info on page 24.

**Turtle holds a solid stay even at a distance, and even as a bicyclist rides past her on this park road (which is closed to cars!).**

I like the wait and stay cues, and I also know that there are many times I ask my dogs to do something like “Go lie down” because I want them to go away from me and settle somewhere – and I know I won’t remember to tell them when it’s okay for them to move around again. When I’ve asked for a stay I know I have to pay attention until I release them again, so I set us both up to succeed by teaching “stay” as a separate cue.

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## RESOURCES

### BOOKS

WDJ Training Editor Pat Miller is author of *The Power of Positive Dog Training*; *Positive Perspectives: Love Your Dog, Train Your Dog*; *Positive Perspectives: Know Your Dog, Train Your Dog*; and *Play with Your Dog*. All of these books are available from DogWise, (800) 776-2665 or dogwise.com

### HOLISTIC VETERINARIANS

**American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association** (AHVMA), 2214 Old Emmorton Road, Bel Air, MD 21015. (410) 569-0795. Send a self-addressed, stamped envelope for a list of holistic veterinarians in your area, or search ahvma.org

### TRAINING AND INSTRUCTION

**Pat Miller**, CPDT, Peaceable Paws Dog and Puppy Training, Hagerstown, MD. Train with modern, dog-friendly positive methods. Group and private training, Rally, behavior modification, workshops, intern and apprentice programs. (301) 582-9420; peaceablepaws.com

**Sandi Thompson**, CPDT, BRAVO!PUP Puppy and Dog Training, Berkeley, CA. Private lessons and group classes. (510) 704-8656; bravopup.com

### SWIMMING

**Pet Immersion Alarm by Safety Turtle**. Attaches to the dog's collar and alerts when it gets wet. (800) 368-8121; safetyturtle.com.

**Sonar Guard Pool Security System**. Alerts when pool water is disturbed (and is not triggered by wind or leaves falling onto the surface of the pool). (877) 467-6627.

**Skamper-Ramp** by Austrol. Fastens to side of pool and enables dogs (and other animals) to exit a pool if they fall in when unattended. Available from many pet supply and pool supply outlets, including America's Pet Store (800-870-1941 or americas-pet-store.com) and Animal Pool Safety.com (animalpoolsafety.com).

**Pet Sunscreen SPF 15**. Available in some retail stores and from Doggles (866-364-4537 or doggles.com).

**Canine life jackets**. Available in pet speciality stores, online retailers, and from some manufacturers. We like RuffWear's K-9 Float Coat (888-783-3932 or ruffwear.com) and Outward Hound's Pet Saver Lifejacket (800-477-5735 or kyjen.com).

PetTech offers **pet CPR and first aid** instructional materials and courses: (760) 930-0309 or pettech.net. Also offering courses on pet CPR and first aid are the American Red Cross (redcross.org or 202-303-5000) and American Safety & Health Institute (pet first aid only; 800-246-5101 or ashinstitute.org).

### Regarding a product mentioned in "Biking With Your Dog" (March 2009)

In the March issue, we recommended three devices designed to enable a dog to safely jog alongside a bike, including one called the **WalkyDog**. We were told that the product had been redesigned, improved, and renamed as the K9 BikeJogger. We have been contacted by a representative of a company called PetEgo, who tells us that PetEgo is now the sole distributor in the U.S. of the original WalkyDog product. According to PetEgo, the K9 BikeJogger is a copy of the WalkyDog product and an infringement of PetEgo's intellectual property rights. The original WalkyDog product is available from PetEgo, (866) 738-3461 or petego.com.

## WHAT'S AHEAD

### Five Things to Do When Your Shoes Get Chewed

*Be advised that "Spank the puppy" is not on our list!*

### The Best Rawhide Chews

*We looked for the thickest, safest rawhide dog chews we could find. Here's how to tell the superior products from ones that could pose choking or bacterial risks to your dog.*

### Socialize – or Be Ready to Exile

*Dogs who are not deliberately socialized often lead short or lonely lives. Here's how to prevent a life*

### The DNA Test

*How useful or accurate are those tests that purport to determine your mixed-breed dog's genetic origins? We compare the tests*

### Good Sports

*The introduction to a new series on canine sports, including earthdog, herding, lure coursing, agility, weight pulling, water sports, disc dog, rally, and more!*