

## **Early Training!** By Bryan Taylor

Here we go again into another season of loving, caring, teaching and learning with our companions—canine—as one writer once penned “The bond with our dog{s} is as lasting as the ties of this earth will ever be.”—Konrad Lorenz. Let’s first look at the senior dog and the care of them. A graying muzzle isn’t the telltale sign you should look for when considering whether or not your dog is a senior. Giant breeds usually become senior around age 5, large breeds around age 6 and medium and small breeds around age 7

### Is Your Dog a Senior?

A senior dog may not show the outward signs of aging for years to come. However, waiting until your dog’s behavior indicates an advanced age to move him to a senior formula may hurt him in the long run. Senior dogs need the nutrients specifically made for them in specialized dog food, and may need other medications and vitamins.

As dogs become older, they typically need fewer calories from fat, but protein is critical to their diet to ensure proper maintenance of muscle tissue, according to the experts at Eukanuba. Reducing protein at the same rate that fat is reduced can result in deterioration of muscle mass needed for vitality throughout the senior years.

Dog foods on the market now are made for specific needs for your dog. Today’s dog foods help senior giant breed dogs stay in great shape by caring specifically for their joints. Large breed dogs still needs strong cartilage and joints to support that weight. Some are fortified with glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate, which helps maintain cartilage resilience and strength.

Even dog biscuits don’t have to be empty, tarter-producing calories. You can give in to “sad eyes” without hindering your dog’s health, provided you don’t overindulge your dog. More and more treats now target overweight dogs, aging dogs, dog dental care, and a healthy digestive tract.

Once your dog hits 5 or 6 years an annual vet visit should include the base blood work, at the very least, to make sure the kidneys and liver are functioning correctly. Blood work is key in indicating signs of a problem, and you have a better chance of recovery if a problem is caught early on. Basic blood work can also show any sign of electrolyte imbalance, nutrition deficiencies, and a multitude of other problems.

Always have your dog checked out by the vet before you embark on a new season of hunting, training or trialing. AND at this time you should also have the vet check for any parasites. Also aging dogs need good dental care. Gum disease affects eating and can even cause heart problems. Tarter and plaque inhibiting treats and dog foods are readily available, as are doggie toothbrushes and meat-flavoured toothpastes. Remember that dogs cannot use our toothpaste—it will make them sick at the very least.

A senior dog doesn’t equal a slow dog; there are merely a few more precautions you have to take. A senior dog needs better housing in the winter, more concern for his food and water, and possibly vitamins. With today’s veterinary advances in medicine, owners now have a variety of arthritis and pain medications to help your dog continue to leave that new puppy in the dust.

Speaking of puppy—a frequently asked question of trainers and breeders is—how long will it take to finish my puppy or retriever into a polished gundog. The answer---it depends. Realistically, I don’t think you can expect to have a seasoned retriever, one would consider finished until they are 3 years old providing each of the following steps is properly completed. Any snags or postponements can extend this estimate. Steps in developing and excellent retriever include:

- Pup selection
- Pup socialization
- Pup pre-training conditioning
- Basic training around 4 to 5 months
- First hunting season
- Advanced retriever training
- Second season
- Second advanced training sequence (3 months)
- Third season

Around the climax of the third season you should have an honest, reliable retriever of upland and waterfowl.

The first key in getting the finished dog of your dreams is to buy the best puppy or started dog candidate you can find. This will be the best money you can spend. The right pup will save you hours in training. At some point I will discuss how not to pick a pup, but to pick litters/breeders. For now, you must remember, “garbage in, garbage out,” and “you get what you pay for,” Good pups don’t cost, they will pay dividends in ease of training, health, and natural ability passed on through genetics.

This time we are going to focus on socialization and pre-training. I am not going to expound on what to do in these two phases but rather what not to do. Owners begin to toy with their pups between 2 and 7 months in a good faith effort to ready the pup for the real world and because the pups are fun to play with. Socialization is fun for the owner-which is why we bought the pup in the first place, to enjoy the interaction with the pup during these first months. But there is a proper way to accomplish this.

Misguided attempts to socialize and train the new pup sometimes can damage the pup in undetected ways that will complicate and slow training processes in the future. Things that occur in the pup’s early life often must be untrained by the trainer or owner in the future. This has many trainers telling clients “do nothing with your pup before you send him to them. Just let him be a pup.” They advise this because it is easier to deal with a wild uncontrollable pup whom has a clean slate versus one that has problems entrenched during his highly impressionable adolescent months.

Actually, the socialization and pre-training development of you pup prior to formal basic training is quite simple and not time consuming. What we want to explore is what not to do. Correcting these avoidable problems will drastically lengthen the time it will take you to get that finished retriever. So don’t go there.

## THE DON'TS OF PUPPY CONDITIONING

1. Too many retrieves. Nothing is gained by repeatedly throwing objects for the Pup to retrieve. A properly bred pup has the drive to retrieve built in—too many retrieves at an early age just promotes hyperactivity and boredom if overdone. A couple of short retrieves with a soft bumper or sock per week in confined area are enough. That's right 2-6 retrieves a week and not more than 2 per session. Let the stoning begin if it must. But this is a pup!!
2. Tug-of-war is horror to fix when you later expect nice delivery of your bird. Pull nothing from your pup's mouth or do things which promote hard mouth—sticks rocks etc.
3. Allowing pups to play with and chew on bumpers???---NUTS
4. Free swimming. Uncontrolled and unrestricted swimming will produce pups that know no difference when it's time for water work. He may decide to hit the water for a refreshing dip when the moods strike him—right in the middle of your training. And how do you respond? By running the bank in a frenzy yelling and screaming and blowing the whistle Now you have taught the pup he is in control in the water and you never—repeat-never want to let him know that.
5. Chasing a pup with any object in their mouth, never not for any reason in play or otherwise. He soon will pick up a bumper and stand there hoping you will chase.
6. Not coming when called. Settle this early—one command –one correction. Don't call to punish—go to them. Around you only good things happen
7. Bolting. When a pup merely bolts to avoid you r wishes, this must be dealt with quickly and early. The older they are the faster.
8. Allowing pups to run free is much like number 7. Keep in control at all times even play is under your control.
9. Shooting over pups while too young or eating their food. Gunfire conditioning comes much later and in a more logical manner.
10. Other common don'ts are:
  - \* allowing play with dead birds
  - \* putting pup on live birds too early
  - \* letting pup jump out of objects like boats and pickup beds. This damages more hips and shoulders than genetic problems.
  - \* snatching objects from the pup's mouth
  - \* punishing pup for carrying valuable objects in the mouth
  - \* allowing pup to chase game at an early age such as chickens, robins, squirrels to build drive ---never
  - \* Rough housing with the kids unsupervised—not wise

Don't condition something into your pup that you must train out at a later time. Pups don't forget. The most important element in pre-training socialization is to develop the pup's confidence and trust in you. Good or bad, the pup won't forget. So my friends let's make it good.

Well the flames are playing and I must be there to watch or they will lose—yeah right. Next time we will explore marking and blind fundamentals—keep smiling it keeps people guessing what you've been up to.

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Just ran across this and I think it is important enough to add to the column.

#### WARNING: RAISINS AND GRAPES AS DOG TREATS

This warning comes from Dr. Laurinda Morris, DVM

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This week I had the first case in history of raisin toxicity ever seen at MedVet. My patient was a 56 pound, 5 yr. old male neutered lab mix who ate half a canister of raisins sometime between 7:30 AM and 4:30 PM. On Tuesday. He started with vomiting, diarrhea and shaking about 1 AM on Wednesday but the owner didn't call my emergency service until 7AM. I had heard somewhere about raisins and grapes causing acute renal failure but hadn't seen any formal paper on the subject. We had her bring the dog in immediately.

In the meantime, I called the ER service at MedVet, and the doctor there was like me—had heard something about it, but... Anyway, we contacted the ASPCA national animal poison control center and they said to give 1 V fluids at 1 ½ times maintenance and watch the kidney values for the next 48-72 hours.

The dog's BUN (blood urea nitrogen level) was already at 32 (normal less than 27) and creatinine over 5 (1.9 is the high end of normal). Both are monitors of kidney function in the bloodstream. We placed an IV catheter and started the fluids. Rechecked the renal values at 5PM and the BUN was over 40 and creatinine over 7 with no urine production after a liter of fluids. At this point I felt the dog was in acute renal failure and sent him on to MedVet for a urinary catheter to monitor urine output overnight as well as overnight care. He started vomiting again overnight at MedVet and his renal values have continued to increase daily. He produced urine when given lasix as a diuretic. He was on 3 different anti-vomiting medications and the still couldn't control his vomiting. Today his urine output decreased again, his BUN was over 120, his creatinine was at 10, his phosphorus was very elevated and his blood pressure, which had been staying around 150, skyrocketed to 220. He continued to vomit and the owners decided at this point to euthanize.

This is a very sad case—great dog, great owners who had no idea raisins could be a toxin. Please: alert everyone you know who has a dog of this very serious risk. Poison control said as few as 7 raisins could be toxic. Many people I know give their dogs grapes or raisins as treats. Any exposure should give rise to immediate concern.

So please folks let's be careful what we treat our dogs.