

BRINGING YOUR PUPPY HOME

(Written by Beth Downey, Amity Hall Boxers)

Q: I'm bringing home a new puppy soon. Is there anything I need to do to get ready?

A: Yes! A puppy means a big change in your life and you are in fact bringing home a new baby so it is very important that you are prepared for the new arrival. Taking time now to plan and get things in order will help to ensure a well adjusted happy Boxer from puppyhood into those wonderful silver faced years.

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1. Start out with the right attitude

The first few weeks of your puppy's new life with you will be busy and demanding. There may be times when you wonder if getting a puppy was such a good idea. Things will go better if you have patience and keep your sense of humor. Remember that puppyhood only happens once. The extra effort you put into it now will pay off in the future.

2. What you will need

Get the supplies and equipment you'll need before you bring home your new puppy! Here's a list.

Stainless Steel Bowls - You will want a 1 quart bowl for your puppy's food when they are small but you will need a 2 quart bowl for feeding your adult boxer. You will also need a 2 or 3 quart wide based, non-tip stainless steel bowl for water. You can also use the ceramic "crock" type bowls. I do not recommend using plastic bowls because they are porous and harbor bacteria which can cause your dog to break out with an irritating acne type rash on their chin and face. DO NOT use the type of water dish that rests in a loop and hooks to the side of your dog's crate. The puppy's head can get stuck in the loop if the dish is knocked out and can result in strangulation of your puppy. If you put water in your puppy's crate, buy a bowl for the crate that is one complete attachable unit instead or use a ceramic crock bowl that won't tip over but also doesn't take up too much space in the crate.

Zoom Groom Brush (Pink) - This rubber brush works best for short coated breeds like the boxer. Be sure to get the PINK Zoom Groom which is the right style for short coats. The purple is designed for long coated breeds. This brush is great for removing excess hair and it gives your dog a wonderful massage as you groom!

Nail Care – I recommend using a cordless grinder instead of the traditional nail cutters. You can find a small cordless grinder at your local hardware store, WalMart or in most dog supply catalogs. Dremel is the brand I recommend. If you decide to go with the traditional nail cutters instead, I personally prefer using the "plier" style cutters instead of the guillotine cutters.

Crate - I recommend using a wire crate. An adult Boxer will need a crate that is at minimum 36" X 24" X 28". However, I very strongly recommend going a size higher, especially for a male or large female Boxer and suggest you buy the next size up which measures 42" X 28" X 32". This crate will allow your Boxer plenty of room where he or she can be comfortable and not cramped. Regardless of their adult size, I use 42" and 48" long crates for all of my Boxers. You can purchase

dividers for the large wire crates and many come with dividers such as the Midwest Life Stages or the Midwest i-crate which both include dividers. The divider allows you to adjust the size for your puppy as he or she grows. You can opt to start out with a 36" crate for your puppy and move him or her to a larger crate once he or she is grown. This is the best way in my opinion but some people do not want to have to acquire two different crate sizes for their dog.

Crate Bedding - For bedding I recommend imitation sheepskin for puppies or adults, although for adults it is best to use double sided imitation lambskin because it will offer more padding. Old blankets are also very useful to use as bedding once your puppy is no longer privy to "accidents" in his or her crate. I would strongly suggest the imitation sheepskin for puppies since this material is designed to wick the moisture from the surface if it is urinated on. This gives your puppy a dry place to sleep even if he has an accident in the crate. I personally line newspaper on the bottom of the crate and place the imitation lambskin on top. The newspaper also helps to absorb any moisture. If you have to be gone several hours and do not have someone to let your puppy out in the middle of the day, you can lay newspaper across the bottom of the crate and then place the lambskin across just half of this space. Your puppy can choose to relieve himself if he needs to until you get home and he will hopefully leave his bedding unsoiled. Some advisors on dog training are against this as they say it can encourage your dog to soil their crate, my feeling is if they have to go and no one is there to get them outside, they are going to relieve themselves in their crate anyhow since puppies have to go potty more often than an adult dog. I have raised puppies this way for many years and none of my adult dogs raised this way grew up to mess in their crates which is why I suggest it to people.

Leash and Collar - You won't want to put out a large investment on puppy's first collar. Buy an adjustable collar (10" – 14" size) for an 8 week old puppy. You can adjust the size as the puppy grows until the puppy grows out of it and needs a larger collar at which time you can buy an adjustable 12" – 22" collar. I recommend you continue with using the flat adjustable nylon or cotton collars that are adjustable and have a snap closure. The adjustable collar allows you to adjust the collar size as your boxer grows. A collar brand I highly recommend is

Lupine. The type of leash you purchase is totally up to the individual but I suggest it be 6' long. Your Boxer will be a large to medium sized dog so you won't want a thin lead that will hurt your hand if the dog should pull. The brand I recommend for leashes is Mendota which is a soft lead on your hand. The ½" thick 6 foot Mendota snap leash is perfect for an adult Boxer. Do not use a choke or prong collar – for walking, if your dog pulls, use a Greyhound (aka martingale) nylon collar (see next item below). This type of collar will give you extra control of your dog when walking without causing the damage and discomfort to your dog's trachea that a choke collar can.

DO NOT leave a collar on your dog when he is in his crate!! A collar can get caught on the crate and your dog could choke to death! This has happened more often than you would think!

Toys - Safe toys such as Kong toys, latex squeak toys (do not buy vinyl), rope toys, stuffed dog toys, Jolly Balls and really, any balls made for dogs! Boxers LOVE balls!! Just watch balls with an outer covering (such as tennis balls) as some boxers like to remove the covering and the pieces can be ingested. Always make sure the ball is too big for you boxer to swallow so he doesn't choke on it. If your puppy or adult dog tears the stuffing out of stuffed dog toys, give them a flat fabric toy instead. The stuffing when ingested can cause intestinal blockage. Wubba Kongs and Wubba Friends are also toys my Boxers love to play with!

Chews - Your puppy will want to chew, chew, chew! You will need to provide your puppy with something to satisfy this urge and I recommend using Gumabones while they are young and teething but I do not recommend this for older puppies or adult dogs who will eat and ingest the Gumabone. My preferred chew product for adult dogs and puppies are deer, elk, or moose antlers which can be found in specialty pet stores or online. Antlers do not crack like shank or knuckle bones and although they are a little expensive, they last a very long time! I do also give my dogs all natural shank bones but once the edges at the end wear thin or chip, or if the bone starts to splinter, it needs to be thrown out. You can buy these in any pet store and the smaller shank bones can be purchased with soft filling which occupies hours of a dog's time! Or buy them empty and fill them yourself

with peanut butter or Cheese Whiz. You can also freeze the bone with the filling inserted and this will keep your Boxer busy for hours!

Always have a safe chew item in your dog's crate with them. This will give them something to do to keep busy in their crate and helps to prevent boredom. I **DO NOT** recommend giving your puppy pig ears, hooves, or raw hide! Pig ears are not healthy for your dog and can carry Salmonella, hooves can splinter and pierce your dog's gums, and rawhide is not easily digested and swells when it gets damp from chewing. This can cause the softened rawhide to become stuck in your dog's throat which is then a choking hazard. I have heard of more than one Boxer that has choked to death on rawhide.

ID Tag and Other Identification – Have an ID Tag with your phone number and a secondary phone number to wear on your dog's collar in case your Boxer gets lost. I strongly recommend you also have your Boxer microchipped. Home Again is my recommended brand of microchip and chip registry but there are other registries out there available that are also good. I also like to have my dog's tattooed with their AKC or other number.

Bitter Apple Spray – This is a safe spray-on product you can use to discourage chewing on inappropriate objects.

Baby Gates - A metal, wooden, or plastic "baby gate" for blocking doorways. I highly recommend and prefer the metal gates which are more durable. Pressure gates will not hold up as well as a gate that you screw into your doorway frame.

3. Puppy-proof your home.

Raising a puppy is a lot like raising a toddler - they get into everything! Puppy proof your home as you would for children. Puppies need to learn what is Okay and what is not Okay. Some of what they can get into can be hazardous to their health and/or to your possessions. You can make life safer for the puppy and your furniture by getting rid of hazards and temptations ahead of time.

To a puppy, the world is brand new and fascinating! He's seeing it all for the very first time and absolutely everything must be thoroughly investigated. Puppies do most of their investigating with their mouths—"Look at this! What is this? Something to eat? Something to play with?" Murphy's Law says that a puppy will be most attracted to the things they should least have – electrical cords, the fringe on your expensive oriental rug, your brand new running shoes, etc. I suggest that you cover/hide electric cords, put smaller items up out of reach, and you can spray larger items that your pup shouldn't chew with Bitter Apple.

Preventing destructive and dangerous chewing is easier than trying to correct the puppy every second. Look around your home. What objects could be put up out of the way of a curious puppy? Bitter Apple spray can be applied to furniture legs, woodwork and other immovable items. Are there rooms your puppy should be restricted from entering until he's better trained and more reliable? Install a baby gate or keep doors to those rooms closed.

Take a walk around your yard looking for potential escape routes. Obviously puppies can get through smaller places than an adult dog so look for these possible areas. Check latches on your gates and ensure they are secure and consider putting a lock on your gate. Check your yard for dangerous items such as poisonous plants, hornet's nests, mushrooms, etc. Make a resolution right now that your puppy will never be allowed to run off leash without close supervision. After getting used to playing in the freedom of his safe fenced yard, he won't ever know enough to look both ways before crossing the street to chase a squirrel. Keep him safe by keeping him on a leash!

Regarding Children. Remember that your puppy needs to be protected from young children, and your children need to be protected from your puppy's sharp teeth. Your puppy will have needle sharp milk teeth until they fall out around 5 months of age. Also, until your puppy learns manners, they can be rough with small kids and love to grab their clothes and pull. Children don't know their own strength around a small puppy and can hurt a puppy unintentionally. ALWAYS supervise children around puppies and be gentle and consistent in teaching your puppy good play manners. (Also see "Training your puppy" below).

4. Everybody needs their own place.

Decide where to put the crate, and have it set up and ready for your puppy's arrival. Where to keep the crate will depend on what is most convenient for you as well as the puppy's response. Many puppies don't like to be isolated in one part of the house while the family is in another, but some puppies won't settle down in their crates if there's too much activity going on around them. You might have to experiment with different locations until you learn what works best for both of you.

5. Training your puppy

Join a puppy kindergarten class with your boxer pup. Most socialization classes allow puppies starting at 2 to 3 months of age. When your puppy is 6 months old, attend an obedience class with him or her. It is recommended you attend AT LEAST 2 or more 8 week sessions. Your 6 month old puppy will learn very differently than your one year old puppy. Choose an obedience class that does NOT use a choke chain. Choose instead a class that teaches on a flat collar using food and praise rewards instead and your Boxer will learn much faster and enjoy doing it!

Puppies play very rough and love to use their teeth! Young puppies have needle sharp milk teeth so if your puppy gets carried away, give him or her a firm but gentle reminder to play nice. You can also react to his or her biting by emitting a sharp yelp like a puppy who hurts and then stop the play for a short moment. The puppy will eventually get the idea that, if he gets too rough, the fun stops.

Never strike your puppy. Dogs of any age will learn much faster if you simply use a stern voice or a simple stern "AH-AH" works extremely well. All of my dogs know if they hear me say, "AH-AH", they need to stop whatever they are doing because it is unacceptable.

As you raise and train your puppy, it is very important that you be firm but gentle in your corrections and even more importantly, you HAVE to be consistent!! If you

are not consistent, your puppy will have a hard time understanding what you expect of him.

6. Feeding your puppy

Feed your puppy 3 times a day until he is closer to 4 months old and then twice a day for the rest of his life. A twice a day minimum is healthier and also believed to reduce the risk of bloat.

NEVER free feed! Your puppy needs to have a stable routine in eating habits. Free feeding also can result in your dog being overweight which can create health issues.

Feed a quality brand of dog food, the cheaper dog foods are not the healthiest food for your dog. Some brands do not carry a puppy formula because they are designed for puppies and adult dogs. If you are feeding a puppy formula initially, only feed the puppy formula until your puppy is 8 or 9 months old and then switch to an adult dog food. After this age, some puppy formulas can cause problems with accelerated bone growth.

Until about 4 or 5 months of age, soak your puppy's food completely in warm water. Once the food is completely soft then feed it to your puppy. This can take a while depending on the kibble so you may want to soak the next feeding each time you feed. I recommend adding a small amount of yogurt or cottage cheese to the food also. After 5 months of age, you don't need to soak the food completely but I do add warm water until it is like a slight broth consistency. The water in the food will cause your dog to lap as he eats and as a result, he will eat slower and inhale less air while eating which is also thought to reduce the risk bloat.

7. List of Recommended books:

The Dog Listener – by Jan Fennell (DVD also available!)

How To Be The Leader Of The Pack And Have Your Dog Love You For It – by
Patricia B. McConnell PhD

Mother Knows Best - by Carol Lea Benjamin

Raising a Puppy You Can Live With - by Rutherford and Neil

The Boxer: Family Favorite - by Stephanie Abraham

Dog Owner's Home Veterinary Handbook – by Debra M. Eldredge DVM, Liisa D.
Carlson DVM, Delbert G. Carlson DVM, James M. Giffin MD, and Beth Adelman
(Editor).

Enjoy sharing your life with a Boxer!