

# Gundog Puppy Training

You have your new gundog pup, the first and most important thing you need to do is start to build a good bond with the puppy.

'Play-training' is a key part of training your puppy as a working gundog.

From the moment your new puppy has settled happily into its new home you need to be gearing everything towards training.

This isn't to say you should put the youngster under too much pressure – which could risk inhibiting the dog for the rest of its life. Instead make all training fun so it's only really 'play-training' or conditioning.

## Keep your puppy close

Always try to keep a young spaniel puppy within 5 meters of you at all time. The principle for this is simple. It's easier to teach them to go out further on a retrieve later on than to have to run them down every five minutes because they have gone too far!

When the puppy goes beyond the 5 meters limit crouch down to make yourself seem small, and call the pup's name to get its attention.

At some point the puppy may ignore your call. When this happens you must raise the pitch of your voice to get his attention and make yourself more exciting. Now back away, calling his name and encouraging him to come to you in a high pitch voice. When he does come back, give him lots of fuss and praise as a reward.

At this part of the training program you may use a treat, but if all goes well it should not be needed.

## Retrieving instinct in spaniels

With spaniels, especially those with a softer temperament, you need to consider the retrieving aspect. A spaniel's instinct is generally the instinct to hunt and the instinct to retrieve may not be so strong. If a puppy is allowed to hunt too much as a youngster, as it grows older it might not be that keen to retrieve. Early training should encourage the desire to retrieve.

Make the early retrieves short and quick, we are not looking for long distance retrieves at this point in the training. Give the pup 3 or 4 short quick, out and back just 1 or 2 meter retrieves to instill the desired instinct to bring back to the handler whatever they pick up. We are not looking at steadiness and making the pup sit, this will come once you have the drive and desire to get the retrieve.

Every time you throw the retrieve say 'GET OUT' as he runs in, this will be used later for steadiness.

This strong desire to get the retrieve will be what the hunting and obedience can be built around.

## Retrieving instinct in Retrievers

With retrievers it's slightly different. We need them to be confident to run out quite considerable distances to pick retrieves. As such, don't worry too much about a retriever going off from you as long as it comes back immediately when you call. You can generally throw retrieves for a retriever puppy two to three times further away than you would for a spaniel puppy. This said however you always start with short retrieves of about 2 meters and slowly build up the distance over a period of time.

Again as with the spaniel training every time you throw the retrieve say 'GET OUT' as he runs in, ready for steadiness training.

If the pup starts to play around with the retrieve and not come straight back, go back to shorter distances and again quick out and back retrieves. If you find your puppy is reluctant to pick up tennis balls, we've found using a variety of small, soft children's toys/teddies can often tempt the puppy into retrieving. I have also found the small Kong very good as they do not always roll in a straight line and will bounce to get the pups attention.

## Delivery

When the pup returns with the retrieve greet him with praise and start to stroke his chest between his front legs, after a short while this will encourage him to raise his head ready for you to stroke him. After a short time slide your hands up under his chin and gently take the retrieve with a soft 'DEAD' command.

Once the pup will come in and stand in front of you to deliver the retrieve you can start to bring in the sit command before taking the retrieve.

## Steadiness

Once you have the pup keen to get the retrieve we can start to tidy up the steadiness.

It is important not to over face the pup too soon with this as it may confuse them and cause more problems with getting a keen retrieve.

I would not start any steadiness training until the pup is at least 6 or 7 months of age and has the desire to hunt until it finds the retrieve and then come galloping back to you.

With the pup on a fairly long lead let him have a few short retrieves with the lead dragging.

Now tell him to 'SIT UP' and stand on the end of the lead.

Throw a short retrieve as the pup run in and comes to the end of the lead, tell him to 'SIT UP' once again. It is VERY IMPORTANT to get this timing correct, you must say sit up just as he reaches the end of the lead. This will obviously be a shock for the pup, as soon as he sits, take your foot of the end of the lead and tell him to 'GET OUT'.

The pup should learn after a couple of retrieves that he must sit until told to 'GET OUT'. After a week or so with the lead on and the pup sit steady you should be able to remove the lead.

In the home

If your puppy is living in a home environment, always be wary of discouraging it from picking up items simply because you don't want him to. The puppy won't know his latest pick up is one of your best shoes, for instance!

If you go down this road – discouraging the puppy when it picks up something 'wrong' – it can have dire consequences in later life. It might put off the dog from retrieving altogether, or it may develop the habit of taking the retrieve and hiding it through fear of getting a telling off or running of and not delivering back to hand.

Instead, try to manage the home effectively, simply place any items that you do not want him to pick up out of his reach. That said, every time he does pick up something in the home you should encourage him to bring it to you. You then have a choice. You can either take it from him and put it out of his reach or, if it's something he's allowed to have, take it from him with lots of praise before giving it back.

## Practising hunting skills

As your puppy matures, both mentally and physically, you'll find you're able to take him out into some rough grass to practice his hunting skills. Once your puppy is a keen retriever, try hiding a few tennis balls in the grass before you take him out and then encourage him (from the down-wind side) to search and find them. This will give the puppy the reward he needs for hunting.

If you find the puppy becomes wise and starts to pull too far away from you, it's quite easy to drop a tennis ball next to you when he is away from you and not looking. Then call him back and encourage him to hunt close to you to find the new tennis ball. This will prove to the puppy that you obviously know where things are and it's well worth coming back to you when called to get the reward of the retrieve.

## Heel work

With retriever breeds the heel work can start at an early age, however with spaniel breeds this is usually done alter as you do not want to stop the pup hunting.

With the pup sat by your left leg on a loose lead, say 'HEEL' and slowly walk forward for a couple of short steps and then stop and tell the pup to 'SIT UP'. Once he has settle down repeat the procedure. This can be done several time before going on to something else in the training session.

The pup must remain level with your leg, if he pulls forward, Stop, get the pup back into the sit position by your side and start again.

This must be done in a calm and gentle manner, it is a matter of repeating and consistency until the pup understands that unless he is by your side you are not going anywhere.