

SUCCEED at raising a Rottweiler Puppy as a Family Companion!

By Diane Richardson



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YOUR goal: to raise that small bundle of black and rust fur to become the loved companion for your family. Sounds easy right? After all, it's "just" a puppy, anyone can raise a puppy... Well, actually, no.

My name is Diane Richardson and I have not been without at least one Rottweiler since 1985. I have also been teaching families how to train their dogs since 1989 and taught competition Rally Obedience since 2005. Additionally, I first worked in and then managed boarding kennels and pet resorts since late 1989. I have met and worked with a great many families and their dogs in those years!

The one constant theme is that raising a puppy to be a GOOD family dog is NOT as easy as it would appear. The top 3 most common causes (in MY experience) for owner dissatisfaction in both families seeking training and families who were boarding clients were the same; obnoxious/ill mannered behavior, destructiveness and mouthing/nipping/grabbing.

Success in raising a puppy is similar to raising a child; you need clearly defined schedules, mental AND physical exercise (and fun!), learning opportunities and reasonable behavioral expectations that are consistently reinforced. Isolationism, military style or evil step mom/indulgent dad methodologies are all inappropriate for baby puppies AND children.

Ideally: you will have researched the breed ahead of time, ascertained that the breed will suit your family and lifestyle, researched health issues, health care and food topics as they relate to the breed specifically, found a veterinarian that actually LIKES the breed, and found a training center whose methodology you agree with (and you have viewed a few classes to confirm this).

Additionally, and hopefully, you will obtain your Rottweiler puppy from a reputable breeder who puts great effort into the choice of parents, their health screenings, pedigree and temperaments as well as into the raising and socializing of the puppies and support of the buyers AFTER the sale.

To do ALL of the above, increases your chance of success in raising your puppy to be a great family companion.

Prior to bringing home your puppy, it is essential to puppy proof any areas the pup will be in. This means anything within 2 ½' of the floor should be safe (crawling about on



L-R: Diane Richardson & U-CD B Mine vd Frolikind zu Frontier, CD, RE, TD, CGC, TT,(4 RAE legs), 2006 ARC 5th place Rally Excellent & 11th place Rally Advanced & Stacia Richardson

all fours may seem silly, but is a great way to get a more "puppy eye" view of the room!). Electrical cords should be as inaccessible as possible, breakables and chewables should be moved higher or to "off limits" rooms, a crate (or crates) should be purchased and set up (remember no collars when in the crate to avoid choking and that bedding might be soiled so should be easy to clean and not hazardous if chewed) and supplies purchased. Decide, as a family, what rooms are totally off limits. Will furniture be off limits? Certain areas of the yard? Be alert for mushrooms or other hazards outdoors too). Talk about what is and what is not acceptable behavior- for both puppy AND children.

Regarding children and puppies, ALL puppies grab, bite, tug and jump on children (as well as adults). They also chew things. How you AND the children handle these behaviors will cement or ruin their relationship! Children should be taught, in age appropriate ways, that running, screaming, wrestling and shrieking are ALL extreme puppy stimulants and will actually CAUSE bad puppy behavior. Puppies should always be crated in another room when it is children wild time or when they have friends over to avoid this over stimulation. Puppies should never ever be without direct adult supervision with the children, not because you don't trust the pup but instead so that the pup is not given the opportunity to make bad behavior a habit. In the event that the puppy DOES become a wild and crazed, over stimulated biting



5 month old Bonnie, She was just told "Ack! What's that? drop it" and she spit out the plant part she had swiped and then looked up like "I was not doing anything"

beast, a simple potty break and nap time in the crate will give all parties time to calm themselves and "reset".

Children should also be reminded that hitting, pulling, pinching, teasing, laying on the floor with the pup, opening crate doors or gates and going near the pup when sleeping, eating or chewing on a high value item are forbidden. Teach them how to disengage a tugging or wild pup by becoming boring (stand still and make no eye contact) instead of becoming more interesting (by running or screaming) and how to ask an adult for help when THEY (the child) feel overwhelmed by the puppy.

INVOLVE the children in training and brushing the puppy so that the pup learns to respect the children (a friend's two year old commands the dogs to sit before mom hands them their bowls in their crates!). RESPECT your children's and the puppy's limitations and find ways to work around them in a favorable manner.

Training. This word encompasses more than you would think. Yes, it means to teach the absolute essentials- loose leash walking, come, sit, down, stay, leave it, drop it, look out, to lie on their side or stand for grooming and tick exams, to not "counter surf" and the other myriad of family dog commands and behaviors. Train also means manners and attitude.

From day one start teaching bite inhibition. What is this? Bite inhibition is the method of instructing the puppy in how to control jaw pressure. Teaching bite inhibition starts with first reducing bite intensity/strength, learning jaw control and instilling the belief that humans are fragile (ok that's somewhat of a lie, but we need the pup to believe that!), THEN once that is well established, you can work on bite frequency. Properly taught, bite inhibition will reduce or totally eliminate accidental injuries and obnoxious grabbing/ mouthing/biting/ nipping. Contrary to popular belief, bite inhibition does not stop a pup from playing allowed biting games like tug or sport Schutzhund, as these are structured GAMES to the dog with pre-taught rules that do NOT involve skin biting. This will also not likely deter a dog from discouraging an aggressive

intruder. (If you ever saw Mariah the trucker's dog on Miracle Pets "Hand Me The Bat" episode, she was one of my pups with outstanding bite inhibition and she still protected her owner). For detailed information on bite inhibition training, read Ian Dunbar's book "After You Get Your Puppy" (some of this information is also available online).

Other very important things to train are "Body handling" (including face/feet/mouth, collar leading and restraint), noise exposure (hair dryers, vacuums, pots and pans, TVs, etc.), environment exposure (once the pup is safe to do so - woods hikes, town walks etc) grooming (brushing, nails), car rides, vet visits (weekly weigh ins for treats are great to build a positive association), teach the pup to look at your face when you say its name, and exposure - in a positive manner - to anything you will expect the pup to be good around as an adult (traffic passing by, livestock, cats etc).

Housebreaking, chewing and stealing - the BIG three. ALL three of these behaviors have one factor in common. The more opportunities the puppy has to make a mistake, the more difficult it will be to break the habit. How this relates to you, is that the family should make a CONCERTED effort to NEVER allow the puppy a chance to make these mistakes. SUPERVISION is primary in all these things. If the puppy is not being 100 % supervised then it needs to be crated.

Take the puppy out many, many times a day (remembering that before or after being crated, after eating, drinking, sleeping and playing are the key points and that activity increases the frequency of trips outside). Do NOT just send the puppy out to the yard to do its business. Someone must go with the pup to make sure it is, in fact, going potty and not chasing birds or eating mushrooms and dirt. Potty trips can be done on a leash to make this task easier. Make sure the pup is not left crated longer than it can "hold it" because you will be teaching it to actually potty IN the crate. Every puppy is different in holding ability (just like children) with some 8 week olds being able to go hours and some 6 month olds not being able to go more than 4 hours without a potty break.

Pups who seem to be urinating excessively should be checked for urinary tract infections as puppies, especially female pups, as they often do have this problem and it is sometimes difficult to diagnose. Puppy poop output is normally greater than food intake. You will reduce this to a point by feeding only good quality brands of feed that are not high in grains and fillers.

Chewing is part of being a puppy. Like teething babies they must chew, additionally, while babies explore the world with their hands puppies do so with their mouths. The basic rule with puppies is if something gets chewed it is the human's fault, always. Supervision, keeping things picked up/put away, having a kid's toy room that is off limits to the puppy, redirection to proper toys and providing sufficient mental and physical exercise reduce or eliminate inappropriate chewing!

Stealing, be it trash or food off the counter, is a habit that can actually be totally avoided by using a simple rule. Leave nothing accessible and leave no food items

unguarded. Pups who grow up with out any opportunities to steal, turn into dogs who don't know that they can! Any counter, table or trash sniffing is verbally discouraged and the puppy redirected or crated if the temptation is too great.

Two other commands that are essential for the family dog in the real world are "Leave it" and "drop it". These are easy to teach to young dogs and are absolutely invaluable when things like Barbies, pieces of plants, rocks in the yard or any other inappropriate item appear in or near the pup's mouth.

Possessiveness is a normal trait in young Rottweiler puppies. To help the family avoid confrontations that may set the puppy up for learning a bad habit give all high value items IN the crate and leave the puppy alone to enjoy them. A high value item is anything that may cause possessiveness but is usually food related. ANYTHING that causes a possessive response can either be banished entirely (bones, hooves, edible chewies etc or as I say "anything that is or that used to be "real" are common culprits) or can be crate only items. It is your choice, but you also must teach your children to avoid the puppy while it is eating or chewing on such things. This does not teach the puppy that it is "King", what it does is teach it to relax and be CALM while having these items, that there is no need for tenseness or defensiveness and even pups that come to your home and growl when you are even in the same room with their food bowl FAST become dogs whom can even be walked by and stood near while eating. The same pups that feel defensive about food etc that are treated to the "old style" punishment or food only comes from the hand if you don't growl method can sometimes become even MORE defensive (the method backfires) because it becomes convinced that you all wish to "steal its stuff". Teach the pup to trade also, by offering a good treat in exchange for a toy and then give the toy back. This sets you up for emergency retrieval of inappropriate things when "Drop it" fails. A great book that addresses possessiveness is Jean Donaldson's book "Mine".

Becoming the dog everyone loves. I know this is a Rottweiler, but in our current social climate, families cannot afford to have a dog that is less than social. I am not talking about a wildly, mooch everyone in the world friendly Golden Retriever. That would not be typical Rottweiler. I am talking about a dog who the public perceives as friendly, or at least nondangerous, when it is out and about with you.

Socialization is a very key factor in owning a Rottweiler, especially a family Rottweiler. The breed as a whole requires a great deal more socializing than some other breeds. One school of thought is that your new puppy needs to meet 100 people in the first 100 days with you. These should include young, old, heavy, thin, facial hair, bald, hats, sunglasses, uniforms, differing skin shades, etc. While this sounds difficult, especially when you are trying to keep your puppy safe from germs it is actually easier than you would imagine. While the pup is still small, you can carry him into places that you don't want him walking like parks (dog parks are never a good plan not even when the pup is older), around shopping center



5 month old Itsy showing handle-ability and also trust in handler!

parking lots, into stores that will allow you, etc. You can also take the puppy to visit friends, neighbors and family (but avoid events like baseball games, fairs etc- you want to socialize not scare, overtire or overhear a young puppy) and introduce the puppy to meter readers, police, garbage men and more. Don't stop socializing once the puppy is no longer a baby or you will lose all the work you have done!

Train your puppy to be mannerly and obedient. This will likely mean going to classes. Not just one as a baby pup but at LEAST two sets before one year of age and one or two more sets between one and two years. (these are minimums and more is always better). Neighbors seeing you work with your dog and people seeing a well mannered dog are less likely to complain or cause you problems and of course a well trained dog is much less likely to cause problems!

Remember to never leave your dog outside when you are not home, or even when you are home but are not paying attention. Boredom can cause your puppy to dig, eat inappropriate things or bark and all of those can also be detrimental to your training process and to neighbor relations!

Does your dog NEED to play with other dogs? No, it is not essential for living, but it makes for good "dog language skills". This does NOT mean the puppy should go to day care, play groups with strange dogs or to dog parks. The puppy does NOT have to grow up loving all other dogs, BUT it should know how to speak its own language and it should not be a danger to other dogs you see when out in public. If you have friends, family or training buddies with healthy, parasite free dogs that enjoy puppies then by all means take advantage of opportunities for them to play. It is ok for the dog to "tell off" a rude puppy and there is nothing like a good old girl dog to bring a puppy into line (boy dogs often tend more towards excessive tolerance!). As long as the puppy is uninjured and unafraid all is well and lessons are learned in canine manners and communication. Do NOT expose your puppy to aggressive or rough dogs, this won't teach them anything and may result in injuries!



5 month old Rose on a "lie" and "wait" command, ready for ear cleaning and toenail clipping

Should your dog mingle with company? When you have guests over, it is a good opportunity for some quick training. However, caution should be used that guests do not allow behaviors that you do not, that neither the guests nor the puppy are afraid of each other and that the guests are not behaving in a manner that might cause poor behavior in your puppy. With adult guests, as long as you are able to 100% supervise all interactions it is fine to leave the pup out and about for at least part of the visit. With children guests it is better to allow greetings to be given and then put the pup in its crate in another room so that the children can interact and play without puppy worries and without the puppy inadvertently learning to display bad manners.

How can you learn to understand your puppy's language? What is the puppy really saying to you? Study your puppy all the time. You'll be amazed how fast you figure out what that head flip means or the whine while walking past the hall. Better yet, if you can find an experienced dog trainer to help you interpret the finer and more subtle signs (is my puppy being aggressive? Slightly insecure? Or outright scared?), your education will speed along much faster!

While this has been a quick overview, and is by NO means complete, I hope that it has given you ideas and directions to follow in raising your own Family Companion Rottweiler!

Reading suggestions:

After You Get Your Puppy by Ian Dunbar

Mine by Jean Donaldson

Culture Clash by Jean Donaldson

Train Your Dog, Change Your Life

by Maureen & Gary Ross

Your Outta Control Puppy by Teoti Anderson

The Rottweiler, Centuries of Service

by Linda Michaels & Catherine Thompson

The Rottweiler by Jim Pettengell

About the author:

Diane Richardson has been "in" Rottweilers since 1985, Shiba Inu since 1995, has taught families how to train their dogs since 1989 and taught competition Rally Obedience since 2005. Additionally, she first worked in and then managed boarding kennels and pet resorts since late

1989. Diane also has a website with a good bit of educational info on it, <http://www.frontierrots.com>

Diane finally had time to break into the performance world in 2003 with her Rottweiler girl, Bea. Prior to this she had dabbled with conformation for years but work (managing boarding kennels) and teaching schedule prohibited anything more serious

Bea obtained her AKC CGC at 13 months; her AKC CD at 19 months-all 3 legs with placements (a 1st, 2nd and 3rd); her U-CD at 2 years; USTTA TT and AKC RN (in 3 straight trials) at 26 months; AKC RA at 27 months old; AKC RE (with a 1st and 2nd placement) in 3 straight trials at 29 months old; AKC Tracking certification easily at 30 months old and 5 weeks pregnant. Bea finished 2005 Tied for 16th place Rally excellent in the American Rottweiler Club rankings in just three trials.

A 6 month maternity leave (for Bea) was terminated by a return to work and her first double Q towards her AKC RAE with double 4th place wins, followed by easily earning her AKC TD in the pouring rain; her second RAE double Q with a 4th place; her third RAE double Q with a 1st place and a fourth RAE double Q with a 1st place in an Advanced class of 50 and a 2nd place in an Excellent class of 41.

In 2006, she ranked 5th place in Rally Excellent and 11th place in Rally Advanced American Rottweiler Club rankings. This was with only attending four trials! Bea's formal name was

U-CD B Mine vd Frolikind zu Frontier CD,RE,TD,CGC,TT (4 RAE legs) and Diane lost her just shy of 5 years of age from osteosarcoma leaving her 2 week old litter motherless.

Bea's daughter, Annie (Frontier Komotion RN), debuted in the Rally ring in April 2006 earning her first AKC Rally leg at 6 months old, she then earned her second leg at 7 months and her third leg at 9 months finishing her AKC RN in 3 straight trials

Diane has had a few articles from her website published in various dog publications, has written some articles for the Rottweiler Quarterly and just finished writing a book of short stories about Bea ("Life With Bea") from which she donates a portion of the proceeds to bone cancer and sub aortic stenosis research.

