

# DOGS

## Your pup is smarter than you think!

By LAUREL COOK

There it is – a furry, wiggly, four-legged little puppy that has all the potential to be your best ever companion at home or in the field.

But how do you train your pup to do the things you want it to do? To many, it is a daunting challenge that at times might seem impossible.

Take hope! It's really not that hard. To begin with, your pup is probably capable of learning everything you want it to. The problem is almost invariably with you, the trainer. From many years of training puppies AND their owners, I offer the following top 10 tips:

**1. Critical Training Period** There are several studies that have shown that the most critical training period for dogs is from 6–16 weeks. That's when pups are like little sponges that soak up whatever you teach them and any concepts they learn during that time will pretty well stay with them for life. You will be missing the best window of opportunity if you wait until your pup is six months old to put it into an obedience class. (And you and the pup will both be living in the dog house if you don't get it trained before then.)

**2. Expectations Are Too Low** I watched a lady at the vet clinic

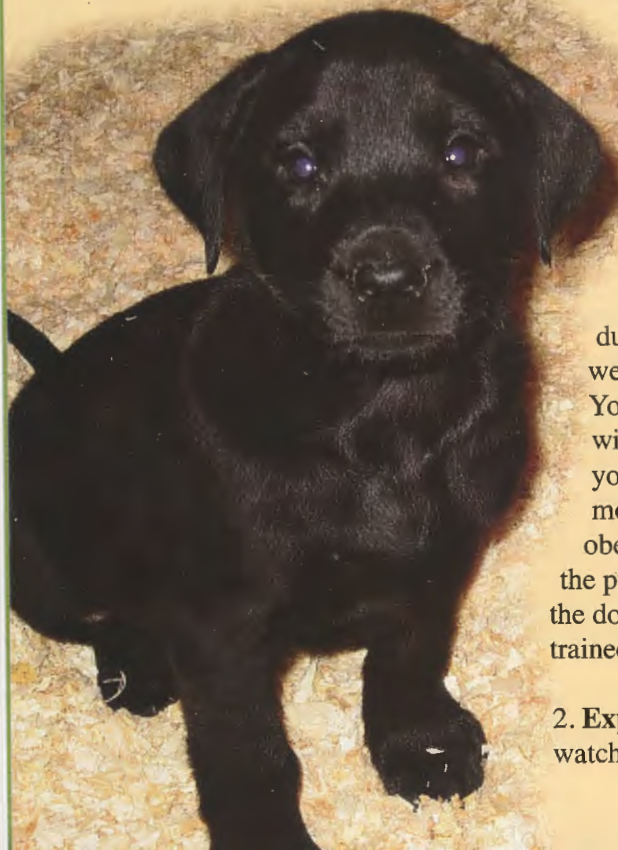
who was practicing Sit and Stay commands with her one year old dog but without much success. She said they were taking obedience lessons and that it was a "work in progress". The other clients in the waiting room nodded understandingly. After all, "It was just a young dog". By contrast, by 16 weeks of age, our pups and our students' pups are doing Sit, Stay, Down, Here, whistle signals, right and left hand signals, targeting, remote sit and more. It always astounds me that people expect way too little of their dogs and then are disappointed that it is all they have achieved.

**3. Use Treats/Food For Motivation** Dogs don't do things to please you. They look at things from a very basic perspective: "What's in it for me?". They will do things either to get a reward or to avoid punishment. Not using treats for training a puppy is like telling a carpenter not to use his power tools.

**4. Train, Don't Force** I often see people pushing down on their pup's haunches or pulling up on their lead to get them to sit. They are always forcing the pup into a command. By contrast, the most important reward in the world to a pup is food, so we let a pup know it is available – and then control access to it. We structure our training setups so the pups learn for themselves what we want them to learn. We rarely touch our pups in a training session.

**5. Feeding Time Is Training Time** We are all very busy these days and it's hard to find the time to dedicate to puppy training. That's why we have designed our puppy training around meals. You have to feed the puppy, so just take a few extra minutes at meal time and train your puppy using the food from its meal. The pup learns a training ethic: if he wants to eat, he has to work. And you learn a training discipline: three times a day you will routinely train your pup.

**6. Only Pay For What You Want** If you give your pup the signal to come and sit at your right side and the pup instead comes and sits at your left side, do not get it to change to the right side and then reward it. Instead, take the pup back to the start point and try it again. Otherwise, the pup will





learn to always come and sit at your left side and then switch to your right side.

**7. Conversational Voice Only** If you're always yelling at a dog or getting angry when you are training, your pup will simply tune you out or just shut down. Keep your voice at a conversational level and save the urgent screaming for when you need it – like when he is about to eat the dinner roast off the counter. **Then** strident and urgent tones are in order.

**8. Perspective of Place** Pups do reason or make the same logic leaps as we do with respect to the perspective of place. To a pup, the command "Sit" in the kitchen means to sit. But the same command in the backyard probably means "Hgeo8j". The pup must be taught to sit in various locations until the command becomes universal. Likewise with people. If you are the only one who trains the pup, it is highly unlikely that the pup will obey commands from your spouse. They also have to train the pup if they want it to obey them.

**9. Take Baby Steps** With young pups, it is essential that training be broken down into very small incremental steps. Many of my students want to jump ahead on their own and then they complain that the puppy wouldn't learn what they wanted. When we go over how they tried to teach the next level concept, it turns out that they tried to go from step 1 straight to step 4 and missed teaching the incremental steps 2 and 3.

**10. Enjoy Your Pup.** And last, but by no means the least, enjoy your pup. No matter the outcome of your training effort, the most important thing you want to teach your pup is that you are a great person to spend time with. ♂

*Laurel Cook and Ross McLaughlin are owners of Culandubh Kennels in Clayton, Ont. They specialize in the breeding and training of fine retrievers as both family and gun dogs. For more information, visit [www.foxredlabs.ca](http://www.foxredlabs.ca).*



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