

## A SAFE HOUSE

Puppy proofing your property secures your pup's surrounding

BY LIZ PALIKA

PUPPY IS A CURIOUS CREATURE. If there is a nook or cranny to investigate, a puppy will find it. If anything is within reach, it will be sniffed and tasted - and if it passes the taste test, it will be chewed. To protect a puppy as well as your belongings, puppy proof your house, yard and garage. The ideal time to do this is before you bring your new puppy home, but if you already have a puppy at home, it's not too late.

Take a good look at your surroundings. Puppy proofing your house and yard does not mean picking up those things that look attractive to you, but rather the things that are attractive to your puppy. Get down on your hands and knees and crawl around your house and yard: This gives you a puppy's view of the world. Keep that perspective to spot and eliminate potential dangers.

### THE KITCHEN

Let's start in the kitchen. Do you keep cleaners and other chemicals under the sink? The contents of kitchen cupboards and trashcans can be dangerous to puppies. Chemicals and even some foods or the wrappings in which the food comes can be dangerous. Chocolate, for example, is toxic to dogs in large enough doses, and it doesn't take much to harm a puppy. Or, say your puppy gets into a cupboard and grabs a loaf of bread. The bread itself isn't dangerous but the cellophane wrapper could be life threatening if it becomes lodged in the puppy's gastrointestinal tract.

Make sure your cupboard doors are secured with childproof locks that a puppy cannot paw open. Ideally, place chemicals and cleaners in a higher cupboard that cannot be reached by a determined puppy.

What is in your trashcan? Is it puppy-accessible? The kitchen trashcan is a prime target for many puppies because it always smells good to them. Those ripe pieces of food and tantalizingly scented wrappers and cans emit an irresistible aroma. You have three options: Keep the trashcan in a latched cupboard, keep it out of reach or use a covered trashcan with a snug-fitting lid. Empty the can frequently, too, especially if you throw away any meat, meat wrappers and meat or fish cans, tins or bones.

### LIVING AREAS

Now let's consider the living room, den or family room. The television, CD player, VCR and assorted speakers all have wires and cords that scream to a puppy, "Come chew me!" Bundle the wires together--twist-ties, ropes or rubber bands work well--and move them out of the puppy's reach. Do not forget to protect the cable TV and telephone cords. If you cannot move them out of reach, cover them with an unpalatable substance, such as tin foil, hot sauce or a bitter spray. Move your VCR tapes, CDs and cassettes to a higher perch or a secured cabinet, and keep that remote control out of reach.

Pack away all your knick-knacks and collectibles. Clear off your coffee table and the end tables. If anything you treasure is within reach of the puppy's nose, move it to a secure place.

Explain to your children that the puppy will want to play with their toys, and in doing so will chew them up. Let your kids know that the puppy will learn to leave their toys alone. Since it's hard to ask the kids to keep all their toys off the floor while the puppy learns the rules, keep the puppy out of the children's bedrooms with a baby gate or close the bedroom doors.

Keep the puppy out of your bedroom, too, unless the puppy crate (or bed) is in your bedroom. The puppy should be able to get back to its bed. Protect your belongings by closing the closet doors and keeping things off the floor. Make sure those dirty socks hit the laundry hamper instead of the floor next to the basket, and keep the hamper lid closed.

In the bathroom, place all medications out of reach. Many medications are potentially dangerous, depending on how much the dog ingests. In particular, acetaminophen and ibuprofen cause vomiting, diarrhea and depression in dogs, even in small amounts. Larger amounts can be fatal.

Houseplants can also be a source of trouble. Plants and potting soil are attractive to a puppy because they smell good. Your puppy can and probably will uproot your treasured plant and spread potting soil all over the carpet. However, the most serious problem stems from the plants themselves. Many houseplants are potentially toxic. Dieffenbachia, ivy, philodendrons and mistletoe are poisonous. To be safe, protect them from the puppy or set them out of reach.

When you think the house is completely puppy proofed, get down on your hands and knees, and double-check to make certain you haven't missed anything. Ask your kids to help you; often they spot things you wouldn't pay attention to. When you are thoroughly convinced that your house is puppy proofed, take a look at your yard.

## THE YARD

First, look at your fence. Walk the length of the fence, checking for holes that might invite a puppy to dig further. Even a small hole, just big enough for the puppy's nose, invites the puppy to try to enlarge it. With enough effort, the puppy might end up in your neighbor's yard or out on the street. Fill in any holes with rocks, crumpled chicken wire or anything else that will discourage digging. Rid the yard of any Foxtail weeds.

Depending on the type of fence you own, check for loose boards, holes or loose wire. Again, any weakness could be exploited, so try to prevent it from happening.

Do you have a pool in the backyard? Or a spa? Fence it off. Innumerable dogs, especially puppies or geriatric dogs, have died in pools or spas because they could not find the pool stairs or climb out. If you cannot fence it, then section off an area of the yard for the puppy, building a safe run or dog yard.

The same applies to your garden. If you want a puppy to stay out of your flowers or vegetables, fence off the garden or build the puppy a dog run. You will want to keep the puppy out of your garden for another reason--tomato and potato vines are toxic, as are other parts of vegetable plants.

Walk around the rest of the yard and pick everything up. Coil up the hose and put away the garden tools, pick up the kids' toys and make sure all fertilizers and pesticides are put out of puppy's reach. Take the cushions off

your lawn furniture and store them. Don't assume the puppy won't chew on something; if it wants to chew or is bored, anything is a likely target.

Consider your landscaping. Many landscaping plants are poisonous, including oleander, holly and nightshade. The leaves of heavenly bamboo, and apricot and peach pits contain poisonous cyanide. Many bulbs, including daffodils, are poisonous. Delphinium, pokeweed, Jerusalem cherry, English ivy, Japanese yew, bird of paradise and morning glories are all deadly if ingested (see "Poisonous Plants" sidebar). If you have any questions about certain plants, call your veterinarian or your local nursery.

## THE GARAGE

Many dog owners want their dogs to be able to enter the garage from the back yard so that when a dog is left outside, it can be protected from the weather. This is fine, except that most garages are filled with dangers. Laundry supplies, cleaning chemicals, yard fertilizers and pesticides are all potentially lethal. Paints, paint thinners, strippers and stains must be placed out of reach. Also put away craft supplies, including glues and paints.

Automotive parts and cleaners are another potential danger. Antifreeze is deadly, and unfortunately, emits a sweet smell that attracts dogs to any spills. Just a few laps of antifreeze are enough to kill a small dog or puppy. A safer type of antifreeze is available, but it can still be harmful to dogs if too much is ingested. Kerosene, gasoline, motor oil and turpentine are dangerous, as well.

Besides toxic substances, other dangers lurk in the garage. Do you store stuff in the garage? What is in each of those boxes? Do you remember? If you're like most of us, it may have been years since you went through everything, and there may be hidden dangers. It takes only a minute for a puppy to rip into a cardboard box, especially if the puppy's nose tells it something interesting is inside. Secure your storage area, or place all potential dangers out of reach.

If your garage is just too stuffed or small to place everything safely out of reach of your new puppy, consider adding an indoor run. Cordon off a reasonable area of the garage, including the dog door, using sturdy fencing. If your dog is a jumper, you may want to add a roof of the same material. With a secured run, you can still store things safely in your garage and still provide a warm, comfortable alternative to the outdoors while preventing the puppy from getting into mischief.

## IF THE PUPPY DOES GET INTO SOMETHING

If you suspect your puppy has gotten into something dangerous, call your veterinarian right away. He will need to know exactly what the puppy chewed on. Did you find a tooth-marked aspirin bottle on the bathroom floor? How many tablets were left in the bottle? Or was the box of rat poison broken open on the garage floor? What brand is it, what are the ingredients and how much did the puppy eat?

What about the puppy's symptoms? Is the puppy hyperactive, lethargic or comatose? Has the puppy vomited or does it have diarrhea? Is the pup hot to the touch or cool? Is there a rash under its coat or on its tummy? Do there appear to be any burns or redness in its mouth. Tell the veterinarian everything, whether you feel it is important or not. Follow the veterinarian's recommendations to the letter.

**YOUR GOAL IS TO PREVENT PROBLEMS**

Puppy proofing does not replace training. Your pup must learn acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Puppy proofing also does not replace supervision and control of your puppy's activities

If your new pup escapes your careful gaze, puppy proofing your house, yard and other living areas makes any areas that your puppy might be able to get into secure. By minimizing danger you decrease the odds that your puppy will hurt itself and destroy other household items. And by reducing puppy-caused destruction, you save yourself a great deal of anger and frustration.

**About the Author:**

Liz Palika and her husband, Paul, share their home with three Australian Shepherds. Liz, a writer and dog trainer, enjoys obedience competition and trained many of her dogs in schutzhund, carting, Frisbee competition, and search and rescue. She is a member of the Dog Writers Association of America and the National Association of Dog Obedience Instructors.

National Animal Poison Control Center  
800-548-2423

ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center  
24-hour hotline  
1.888.426.4435

**POISONOUS PLANTS - The following plants are poisonous to dogs.**

**TREES**

- Japanese or Chinese tallow tree
- Youpon tree
- Chinaberry tree

**VINES**

- English ivy
- Yellow jasmine
- Wisteria

**SHRUBS**

- Azalea
- Holly bush
- Hydrangea
- Ligustrum and privet
- Oleander
- English yew

**BULBS**

- Amaryllis
- Daffodil jonquil and narcissus

Hyacinth

Iris

**SMALL PLANTS**

Caladium & elephant's ear

Chrysanthemums

Foxglove

Lantana

Larkspur

**WILD PLANTS**

Elderberry

Greenleaf mistletoe

Mushrooms and toadstools

**HOUSE PLANTS**

Dieffenbachia or dumbcane

Tomato plant leaves

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