

Getting Started

It's never too early!

So often I hear this:

"My puppy is so young!

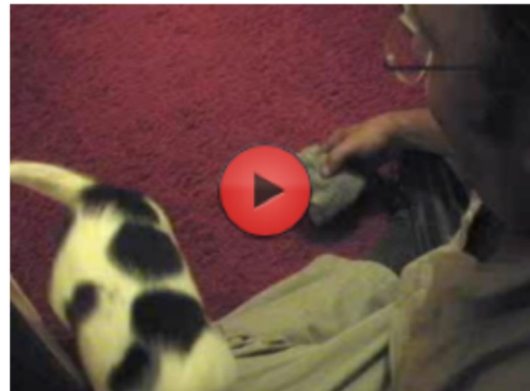
I thought I would wait until he gets older to start retrieving."

The fact is that these little pups love picking things up and running off with just about anything they can carry, shoes, socks, you name it. The key is to have total control of the situation and to set things up for success. First time retrieving in a wide-open back yard is a sure recipe for failure and good luck catching your pup as he runs off. I prefer to start training as early as possible with my pups. 10 to 12 weeks is about right but be patient with him, as his eyes cannot follow an object flying through the air.

Begin retrieving in a hallway and close all the doors to other rooms to get rid of all distractions. You don't need an audience for this, as quietness is a prerequisite. A simple rolled up sock is all you need at this stage and you should have a whistle. Most handlers use an Acme 210 whistle or a Buffalo horn whistle, both of which are high pitched and low in volume. Try to keep the volume low at all times as dogs are not deaf and their sometimes lack of response is not because they can't hear you but rather that they are preoccupied with something else...(a learned response) Sit five to six feet from the end of the hallway (with your legs helping to block the exit). Wiggle the rolled up sock in front of his nose and along the floor until he tries to catch it, and then gently lob it towards the end of the hallway. If you throw it too quickly pup will not be able to follow the line of flight. Having seen the sock land pup will chase, grab and run away with it. There is only one way out and that's past

you. As he attempts to rush past you catch him pet him and tell him how good he is. With your left hand, thumb and middle finger, gently push his cheeks inwards towards his teeth. This will cause his mouth to open and you can remove the sock from his mouth and saying "Give" at the same time. Again praise him, he doesn't know what he did but whatever it was it feels

good. This is positive training and is the best kind. Repeat two more times and then move back three or four feet giving longer retrieves. Do not give pup more



than six retrieves per session and try to discourage pup from shaking his head from side to side with the sock in his mouth. Repeat retrieving sessions once or twice a day until pup is retrieving to hand, and then try one retrieve outside along the side of the house or a fence. If pup runs away with the sock you will need more work in the hallway. Remember consistency and control over the situation is the key to success.

Use various types of terrain to create a hallway scenario. Some examples would be a footpath through a wooded area, tire ruts made by vehicles through a field and if you live in the north, a path cut by a snow blower though your back yard works well. What you want to do is set things up for success. I will repeat this many times because it's the key to

Getting Started

training and you will get better response with praise than punishment.



Your pup will soon get too big for the sock and require something larger. Purchase a canvas-retrieving buck. Don't use sticks or balls. Retrieving bucks resemble the shape of a bird and by taping pigeon wings to it later on you will get him accustomed to feathers.

A word on the fetch command

If you have ever been at a Spaniel field trial you may have noticed that handlers call out the dogs name to send him for the retrieve. This is good practice as it would be very confusing if everyone said fetch, especially when there are two dogs sitting and raring to go. More experienced dogs will recognize his master's voice and will not budge until the command is given, and only by his handler. At times, during training, a trainer may rime off three or four names and finally the correct one is given, launching the dog into action. This type of conditioning is for the more advanced dogs and is good brain work for them. I would advise to use the dogs name for the fetch command as this will, over time, instill more control over him. I do recall where this just wasn't the best

idea. The dogs name was CFC Royal Big Five O (as in the letter o) and his call name was O, sounds like "NO"...confused yet?...so was the dog. But early in the dogs career the owner recognized the problem and made adjustments in his technique to become a very successful competitor.

There will come a time when your pup will test you. Below are various actions and reactions. Remember that it is always better to avoid a problem than to have to solve one. So read your dog and recognize some of the symptoms and nip it in the bud early. The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. If your pup is not complying with what you want him to do then perhaps your method is not appropriate and a different approach is in order.

- **Pup runs out for a retrieve and lies down with the dummy in his mouth.**

Too many retrieves during one session. A dogs attention span is very short and concentration is lost quickly so don't let him get bored. You want to keep him mentally hungry and always wanting more. Both you and your pup may wish to play fetch for the rest of the day but by quitting early he will have much more desire for the next session.

- **Pup runs out for the retrieve, checks out the dummy but runs off to check for other things of interest.**

This could be a simple sign of boredom; refer to the previous scenario.

However, should he do this from

Getting Started

the first retrieve we have a different problem. Don't get too discouraged, as this may be a minor setback. Look at the positive side, at least he ran out there to check it out. I used to train with a more experienced handler and I recall him saying to one of our discouraged club members

"Jim! They don't hunt dummies!"

Try to find something that is of interest to the pup. I will resort to anything that works. Over the years, I have used small nerff toys; the foam padding you find on the handles of dumbbells; and even a super light foam boat bumper to make the transition to the canvas buck. Remember if you had success with the sock in the hallway, it's just a matter of finding the right transition device. If you were not successful in the hallway, however, and you are out in the yard with a dummy then you are putting the cart before the horse.

In some cases older pups may be required to do some bench work but this should be left up to a professional as force retrieving is very tedious and demanding of both the trainer and the pup and an amateur should never attempt this.

- **Pup runs out for the retrieve and runs off with dummy in his mouth.**

This is a game that some pups play "I got it, and you can't have it, so try to catch me!"

The worst thing you can do is lose your cool and yell at your

pup. He will quickly become afraid of you and may then run away from you due to fear rather than because he is being playful. There are two things you could do to get him to come in to you immediately to attain some degree of success.

1. *Get as low to the ground as possible (maybe even lie down) and call him in. Your pup loves you and should want to be with you.*
2. *Simply walk him down and try to corner him. Don't try to run after him, he has four legs and you only have two. One thing to remember, you must always win and a young puppy should never think that he could outrun you. Once this is instilled into his mind he will never forget it. It is obvious that you don't have control over the situation and steps must be taken to avoid this type of action. If he is still very young, it's back to the hallway. If he is older you might have to resort to some other means. Purchase a roll of three-foot high chicken wire and make your own hallway along your house or property fence making it only three or four feet wide. I find that this is best as the pup doesn't realize that he is fenced in and when he tries to escape he is surprised by the fence as his head meets the wire and at that instant you say "NO! COME" He will think that somehow you did this and will usually comply. Over a few days he will become proficient in his retrieves and you will be able to slowly move*

Getting Started

back, giving him longer retrieves until you are completely out of the runway some 20 feet. Read your dog and ensure he is complying with your commands and then give him one retrieve outside of the runway. If success has been attained stop the session and lavish him with praise and don't forget to give yourself a pat on the back, you deserve it. You have set this up for only one result "SUCCESS" and you win by having control over the situation. Continue future sessions with the runway but gradually giving him more retrieves outside of the run until you are confident that he will always comply.

Other ways of attaining good results are using a check cord or a retractable leash but I find that the cord gets tangled with an enthusiastic pup.

Chicken wire is cheap and you may need it later on to contain your pigeons for later and more advanced training. (We'll get to that later!)



- **Pup runs out for the retrieve and returns with dummy in his mouth but circles around you over and over again not wanting to give it up.**

This is very common and very annoying. The simplest cure is to have a fence or building directly behind you and when the pup returns he can only come straight to you with no fooling around. I recall training one pup that was a little on the shy side and avoided me once she had the dummy and would not come straight into me. Her owner asked me to work on her and as time went by I noticed that she really enjoyed the company of the other dogs in the kennels and would always head for the kennel building to be with the others. To solve this problem I jimmyed the big door open, threw the dummy and backed into the building; I then knelt down, and called her in. It wasn't long that she started looking forward to each session, and her excitement became almost uncontrollable when it came time to play fetch. She turned into a wonderful hunting dog with unmatched determination on every retrieve.

The bottom line is use whatever it takes to achieve success.

- **Pup is not interested in retrieving at all. He won't even chase a ball.**

If the puppy is under 14 weeks he may not be able to follow objects thrown through the air. As if to say, "What the heck was that?" Instead, try rolling objects for him to chase. If he is older you might want to have his eyes and his overall health checked.

If I come across an older pup that refuses to retrieve I will toss

Getting Started

out a taped wing pigeon for him. This usually sparks some interest and he may attempt to pick it up from sheer curiosity. At this point you have an ember glowing and it's your job to kindle it and work it into a flame. Don't overdo it and by all means don't pressure him into retrieving the bird. It is most likely your fault that this pup is responding this way because of the lack of early introduction.

If there is absolutely no desire to retrieve I would check the lineage of the parents (something you should have done before you purchased the pup); perhaps it's just not in him. The main purpose of a hunting dog is to retrieve all shot game and unfortunately this pup will not make the grade. He will, however, make an excellent pet. As usual the truth does hurt.

Your pup should have fun during these training sessions and will enthusiastically look forward to each as the tasks become slightly more demanding. Remember to move forward with baby steps and not to proceed too quickly. However there is a fine line between advancing slowly and boredom. So read your dog and proceed at his pace of learning, each dog is different. You may have noticed there is only one place where I have mentioned how old a dog should be to perform a given task. Anyone who tells you that your dog should have completed this, or that by a certain time line, really doesn't know dogs. Everyone is different, and they all learn at a different pace. Don't worry about repeating a previously covered section, sometimes it's like taking three steps forward and two steps back but

over all you and your pup are moving forward.



Water

Weather permitting now is the time to introduce your pup to the joys of swimming. Refer to the chapter on water introduction.



I hope you enjoyed Chapter One and that it was helpful. The rest of this training manual will slowly get a bit more advanced and you and your pup are ready.

For the complete document go to <https://www.settingupforsuccess.ca>