

CREATING A PUPPY HABITAT



The number one mistake puppy owners make is too much freedom, too soon. When puppies are placed with their owners, they are typically in a very dependent stage of development. They follow people around and need to be with you. However, when 5-6 months rolls around, two things happen: 1) They become much more independent and want to explore without regard for their safety 2) Their baby teeth begin to fall out and their adult teeth come in...which means they turn into little chewing monsters. Another consideration is that puppies do not have the muscle control or awareness to “know” they have to go to potty until they are 14 weeks of age. So it is impossible for them to “tell” you they have to go if they don’t even know themselves. Sometimes you will even see a puppy potty in the middle of walking! So, for these two reasons – housetraining and to protect themselves from danger, it is important to create a puppy habitat. I usually create both an indoor habitat and an

outdoor habitat for the puppy, and use the habitat until they are at least 8 months old. I will transition the puppy to a crate for sleeping and when I’m not observing the puppy. I typically use a crate for this purpose until a puppy turns 2 years old, or until the puppy proves it is done chewing up everything it finds.

The ideal indoor puppy habitat should have the following things:

1. **A Cleanable Floor Surface.** I recommend getting a scrap piece of linoleum if you do not have a section of your house with tile or linoleum.
2. **An Exercise Pen** to confine the puppy to a particular area. This can be done with baby gates, but be very careful to look around at what is inside that area and ask yourself if you are o.k. with things like cabinets and furniture being chewed on. I prefer a [modular panel exercise pen](#) because it protects those things and can be moved from place to place, and re-shaped as needed. It can also be easily packed up and taken along with you if you travel with your puppy. You may need to use walls or shelves to brace the x-pen up against, but you can get a few pieces of [white board Wainscot wall panel](#) from the home improvement store to protect your walls.



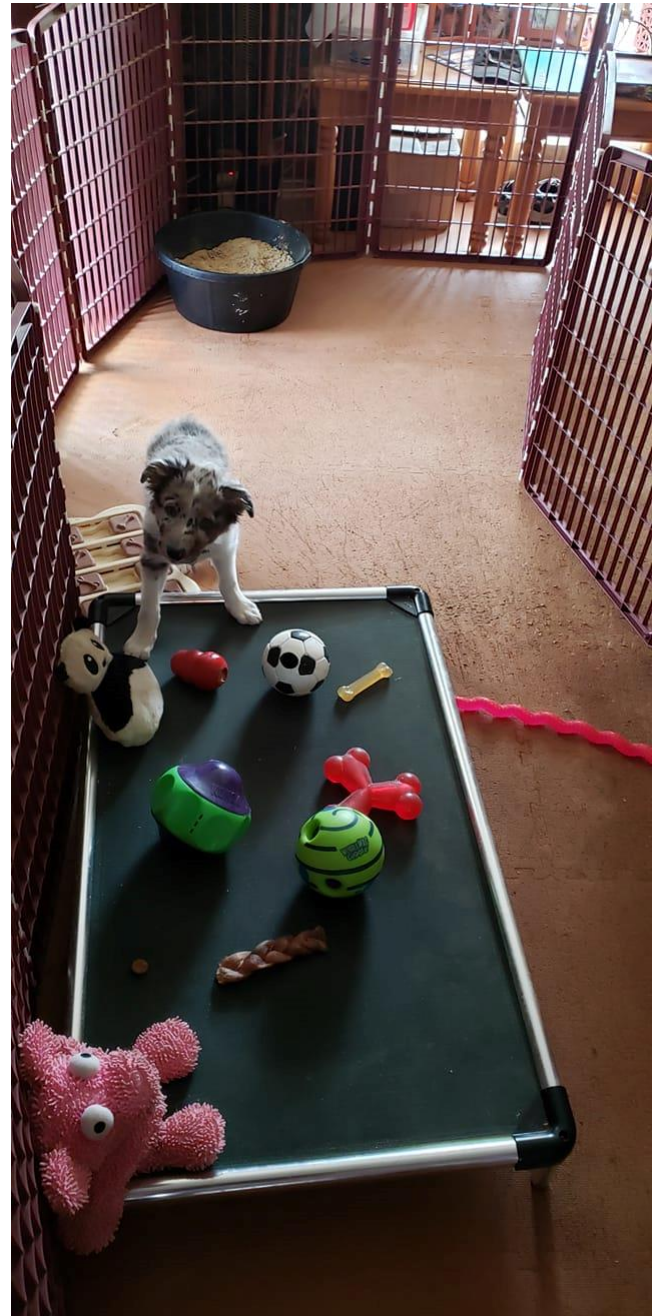
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- Toys that are safe for puppies to chew.** Some of my favorites are the [Benebone](#), [Puppy-Safe Chew Nylabone toys](#), [crunchy-sounds toys](#), [Rubber chew toys](#), [Tuffy toys](#), and [Kong toys](#). Of course, you should always monitor your puppy with toys, to be sure they don't tear off a piece and swallow it. As your puppy develops adult teeth, this supervision will become more necessary, and you may need to remove a few of the less durable toys. However, remember that the goal of a puppy chew toy is not necessarily that it is completely indestructible. You want the texture to feel good on the puppy's teeth and gums. The process of getting adult teeth in takes up to a year! It is also beneficial to give your puppy things that the puppy CAN digest. My favorites are [tripe twists](#) and [bully sticks](#) in [bully-stick-holders](#).
- Things that are safe for puppies to climb on** (that won't allow them to get out). I use a [non-slip step stool](#) and an [elevated dog platform](#). Don't be disappointed if your puppy chews up a soft plush bed. Many soft beds are just too much like soft toys for a puppy. Instead, something like a [Kuranda bed](#) will get your pup off the floor and be more chew-resistant. Resist the urge to put blankets or towels in with your puppy – they will end up urinating on them or chewing them up.



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- 5. An Emergency Place to Potty.** A [doggie litter box](#) with [pine pellet litter](#) or an [artificial grass](#) doggie litter box. Remember that your pup doesn't know it has to go until 14 weeks of age. You want to give an "emergency" place to potty if needed. You want that place to look and feel as close to the outdoor environment as possible. I do NOT recommend potty pads, because they look and feel like carpet / fabric. That's not what you want to teach your puppy. There is an important concept call "substrate preference" in dogs. They learn at an early age what surface is their preferred potty surface. The pine pellet feel like a natural area and the artificial turf feels like grass. Again, this is just for your pups in case of a sudden "OMG I have to go NOW" occurrence. It is best to take your puppy outdoors every few hours. The rule of thumb is a puppy can hold it for as many hours as they are months old (until 8 months, where it stops as a maximum). So, if you have a two month old puppy, you should be taking your puppy out every two hours.
- 6. Mental Stimulation.** Another must-have is a [puzzle toy feeder collection](#). Puppies need to explore and use their minds. Don't leave food out in a dish! Give the puppy a way to burn off energy and eat a meal. Use a [treat-dispensing ball](#). You should also hold back at least one meal and use that food for training.
- 7. Crate (Den).** Every puppy should be taught to go into a crate for their own safety. Dogs are "den" animals and will seek a covered place to sleep. You can place a crate inside your puppy habitat so that they puppy can go in and out as they like. When you give your pup the puzzle toy with food in it, place it in



the crate and close the door. Open the door when the pup is done and calm. Repeat this every day, a few times a day (as often as you feed your puppy a meal). You can also stuff a [Kong](#) with peanut butter and place it on the crate. Bully sticks (in a [bully-stick holder](#)) and [tripe twists](#) can also be given in the crate. All of these things will teach your puppy that a crate is a good place. You should also use the

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crate for car rides, and place these items inside the crate. Did you know that if your puppy is loose in the car and you slam on the brakes that your puppy could be thrown through the windshield? Also, riding free in the car can contribute to car sickness. I prefer a solid plastic crate like a [Ruffland Kennel](#) (rather than a wire crate) because it is easy to clean and because the puppy cannot get its teeth caught in it. Wire kennels allow more air flow but they can be dangerous if a puppy tries to chew on them.

8. **Things That Make Fun Noises.** It is important to expose your puppy to different sounds in a positive way while they are young and impressionable. I like to keep soothing instrumental music on for the pups. However, I also like to have a [Giggle Ball](#) and a [Babble Ball](#) for play and interaction.

9. **Comfort Items.** If you get your puppy from a breeder, ask for one toy or blanket that was with the puppies to take home. It will have the littermates' and mother's smell on it. You can also get a [Snuggle Puppy with Heartbeat](#) toy. In addition, you can have a lavender diffuser and some calming music in your pup's habitat to sooth the puppy.

An Outdoor Puppy Habitat. You can also set up an exercise pen outside. This will give the puppy a safe place to be, so that you can supervise your puppy. This is especially important if you have other dogs in the family or live in a rural area where there are hawks and owls. Always monitor your puppy outside. Be careful that the area does not have sticks or stones or other objects the puppy can eat. I prefer washed play sand for the surface because it is easy to pick up poop and sanitize.



Puppies also love to dig in soft sand, and this is a great way to tire your puppy out.

