

Explanation of Common Dog Training Equipment

There are some items every dog owner should have in order to train, keep their dog safe, and maintain control in a humane way. Most basic training supplies are affordable and can be found most places where pet supplies are sold.

COLLARS

Every dog should wear a collar. It should not be too tight or too loose. A growing puppy's collar should be checked for fit at least once a week. When a collar is too tight it is, at minimum, uncomfortable for the dog. Eventually, it can cause swelling of the neck above the collar, and soon after, swelling of the head. After a period of time a tight collar can cut into the skin and in the worst cases will have to be surgically removed. Most collars are on correctly when two or three fingers can fit easily between the collar and the dog's neck.

What is more common are dogs wearing collars that are too loose. Dogs quickly learn the head tilt motion that allows them to slip out of their collars. This usually happens when dogs want to resist their handler's commands, or when they are frightened and want to get away.

the Canine Coach

by Valerie Broadway



There are many different types of collars. Most dogs, especially young puppies, can be trained using a regular flat collar with a buckle. Collars work best when they are placed up high on the dog's neck, right behind the ears. A training-type collar may be needed for dogs who are more difficult to work with due to excessive energy, fear, or defiance. When training collars are on correctly they will not come off over the dog's head when the dog is resisting.

An effective and humane training collar is the martingale. Martingales are typically nylon with a separate piece of nylon or chain that causes the collar to tighten when pulled and automatically loosens when the pulling stops.

Choke chain collars are harsher than martingale collars. There is a right and wrong way

to put them on. When the collar is on incorrectly it tightens up during a correction but doesn't loosen afterward. If the collar stays tight all the time, the dog doesn't understand the difference in what is right and wrong.

Prong collars (aka: pinch collars) are plastic or metal collars that poke all around the dog's neck when they pull on the leash. This type of collar is rarely needed for the typical family dog. Most dogs are capable of learning to exercise impulse control so they don't pull on the leash without having to inflict pain.

Shock collars used for training purposes seem to work only as long as they are on the dog. Most owners eventually want to take the shock collars off their dogs. However, they find the dogs are aware when the collar not on and quickly revert back to unwanted behavior. The person controlling the shock has to resist the temptation to turn the intensity of the shock to too high. The timing of shocks has to be precise to be effective. The proper response to a shock should be the dog perks up like they just heard an interesting sound. A yelp from the dog means the shock is set too high. Often people are shocking dogs when they are angry and end up abusing their dogs instead of training them. Be aware that highly focused or intense dogs may not respond to even the highest level shock.

LEASHES

All dogs should be taught to walk politely on a leash. People who live in rural areas sometimes think their dogs never need to be on a leash because they have plenty of space to run around. However, dogs learn a lot about who is in charge by understanding which end of the leash is leading.

For training purposes there is really not a use for retractable leashes. Six foot long nylon or leather leashes are the most flexible for a variety of training scenarios. Be sure for very small dogs that the clasp of the leash isn't too large or heavy. The weight can cause pain or nerve damage to the neck. A lightweight cat leash is a good option for dogs under 15 pounds. For large dogs or extremely powerful dogs a

double-thick leash can be more comfortable to hold. This is basically two leashes sewn together. Most pet stores have at least a few of these in their inventory.

TRAINING LINES

Training lines are basically long leashes. They're also called long-lines or training leads. A good length for typical family dog training line is 15-20 feet. A half-inch wide training line is best for smaller dogs and 1-inch wide for large dogs.

Training lines are helpful when working outdoors. Dogs have more room to move around than when on a regular leash but the handler still has control. The handler decides how little or as much of the line the dog gets at any given moment.

Training lines are useful when teaching the "come" command (aka: recall) and the "stay" command. Start off using a short amount of line and as the dog does well at that distance then increase the length of line.

Another good use for training lines is to teach dogs how to play properly with other dogs. The line can be used to stop dogs when they are being too hyper or inappropriate. Extract them from the play (about 20 seconds) and when the dog calms down they are released to play again. Most dogs understand after a couple of play sessions and will begin to catch themselves and calm down.

People don't think about keeping dogs on leashes inside the house, but after only a couple of days dogs are much more respectful and responsive. Until dogs are under the owner's complete verbal control they should be kept on a leash or a training line. This way they are never allowed to get away with bad behavior since the owner has the ability to immediately correct it.

The explanation of basic dog training equipment will continue in next month's Chatham County Line.

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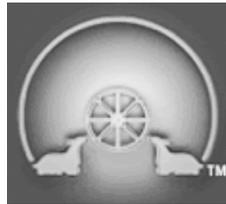
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