

David's Training Tip #2

Introducing Pups to water

Our long term goal for our future bird dogs is to have them be fearless of all types of cover, terrain, and of course.....water. We want our dogs to be excited to enter the water, and to do so without hesitation.

Here, I will give you the two most common scenarios with tips to encourage water entry. The first scenario is you have purchased a pup with proper bloodlines from a reputable breeder and have been developing his drive to retrieve since you've acquired the pup. Most breeders will have already exposed your pup to birds and water. Some breeders use cheap kiddie pools from discount stores and allow the litter to explore the water on their own. Pups will splash, play, and wrestle in the water on their own. I've never seen a litter of well bred pups that won't enter the pool and play with little or no encouragement.

If your pup has not been exposed to this, it will be your job to do so. Fill the pool to a level that will allow the pup to maintain contact with the bottom and have an easy way to access and exit the pool. Blocks or bricks will work nicely. You may have to enter the pool to encourage entry initially. If you have a timid dog, do not praise him while he is acting timid. If something frightens your dog, be it a loud noise, airplane, siren, etc...simply keep your body language in positive confident posture and speak in a bold and confident tone. If you praise or "baby talk" to your dog while he is frightened, you are rewarding/reinforcing that behavior.

When the pup is plenty confident in the water, you can begin to toss puppy bumpers into the pool and watch him explode to play and or retrieve the bumper. Encourage the pup to return to you, but do not demand it at this early age.

Take the pup to your local water hole where entry is easy and the depth is gradual. Never push, pull, or toss your pup into the water. I've seen many owners make this mistake, and it can be very difficult to overcome. Toss your bumpers into the water's edge at first, making retrieval of them simple and fun for the dog. Enter the water if you have to in order to encourage pup to follow. Give high praise for entering the water. Have another bumper in your hand ready, to encourage the pups return to you. If the pup drops the bumper at your feet, immediately toss the other bumper into the water. This teaches pup that a speedy retrieve will yield another retrieve. Gradually increase the distance and depth of the retrieves. It is very important, in all aspects of puppy training, to cease training when the pup is at the peak of his enthusiasm and drive. I will normally toss my last bumper into the water with pup watching it, and hold him back. While he's begging to go, I'll put him away. This accomplishes two things. The pup will still be enthusiastic when you put him away, and will learn there's always something fun awaiting him in the water.