



Puppy Proofing Your Home and Garden

Our homes and gardens have many hazards for young puppies. Things that we never dream of as risks for mature dogs can quickly be life threatening for curious puppies.

Young puppies can easily and quickly get into trouble –

- they have no concept of risk and danger
- they explore things with their mouths
- chewing feels good
- they have extremely sharp little teeth that can pierce electrical cords etc.
- they can often get up more easily than down
- their coordination and balance are still maturing

Puppies raised with Puppy Culture methods (and other high enrichment protocols) tend to be confident enrichment seekers, which means they are always ready to try new things – perhaps some ‘not so safe’ new things.

Here are some tips to help you make your home safer for your puppy.

1. Take a “puppy’s eye view” tour around your home – this will likely mean getting down on all fours (or lower!) if you are expecting a small puppy!
 - a. Look for things that might be harmful if chewed – electrical cords and outlets, cables, phone cords etc. Cover electrical outlets with protectors to prevent them from being licked. Raise cords off the ground or pass them through pvc pipes to prevent chewing. Unplug electrical items that do not need to be plugged in continuously.
 - b. Look for tipping hazards – things that the puppy can pull or knock over onto himself. Lamps, small appliances etc. can easily be pulled over if a puppy pulls on a table cloth or cord.
 - c. Look for slip and fall hazards – open stairways and balustrades are especially risky for small puppies that can easily squeeze between stairs or under the lower bars / between bars of balustrades. Outdoors, raised decks can be a risk. (see below)
 - d. Look for potential poisons and make sure they are well secured - medications, cleaning products, health and beauty products, sugarless gum and candy, toxic plants, rodenticides, antifreeze etc. are all risky for puppies. Even if products are in closed containers they may not be safe. An industrious puppy can quickly chew his way through most containers. Childproof medication caps are not puppy proof. Many houseplants are toxic to dogs. Remember that industrious puppies whose climbing skills may develop faster than you think can reach even plants on tables!
 - e. Look for suffocation hazards such as plastic bags and move them to secure locations out of reach for pups.

2. Start practicing good safety habits before you bring your puppy home –
 - a. Develop a few new good habits
 - i. Always closing closet doors
 - ii. Always closing the toilet lid
 - iii. Always putting shoes behind closed doors
 - iv. Always putting purses and coats (the pockets of which contain the same hazards as many purses!) in a puppy proof location
 - v. Find new homes for any open storage containers (bins of craft supplies, yarn, toys etc.)
 - vi. Be on the lookout for small items that fall on the floor that may be choking hazards or cause bowel damage or obstructions – paper clips, hair bands, staples, sewing pins or needles, razors etc.
 - b. Keep kitchen and bathroom garbage in dog proof / tip proof containers
 - c. Keep TV and sound system remotes and all items with batteries in secure locations – designate a safe place for them that puppies cannot reach.
3. Safety proofing stairs and balustrades
 - a. If you have open stairs, you may need to barricade the top or bottom (or both) of the stairs using baby gates / dog gates or Xpens. If the stair risers are open, this will be especially important as it is very easy for small puppies to lose footing and squirt out between the stairs! If it is necessary for pups to use the stairs, building a ramp with a non-slip surface up one side of the stairs can help. I do not recommend allowing puppies to run up and down stairs at 12 weeks as this can be hard on joints. If the pup needs to do more than three or four steps, it is recommended to carry them down. For balustrades, plastic fencing zip tied to the bars is a handy fix until puppies are too big to fall through. Also watch decks as puppies have no fear of launching themselves off the top of steps and fractured legs are common when they do this.
4. Confinement is your friend!
 - a. Crates and Xpens are very helpful in keeping your dog safe, especially when you cannot monitor his activity closely. If you are a way from home, a crate is likely best, provided you are not going to be away too long – the recommended maximum crate time is the puppy's age in months plus one. For longer absences, making a safe space using Xpens is a good alternative. Be aware that some dogs quickly learn to climb Xpens. Fabric covers are available, but many puppies figure out how to get out from under them. Wire Xpen covers are more secure but need to be well clipped down so that the puppy cannot get head out and then get stuck. The Courtyard Kennel version of an Xpen is more expensive but much better.
 - b. A safe room may also be an option if you have a suitable space but puppies have been known to chew baseboards!
 - c. Before you get your puppy make sure you have an appropriate sized crate and at least one Xpen or Courtyard Kennel.
 - d. You can also create inexpensive barriers with plastic lattice fencing and some hooks.
5. Escape proof your exterior doors and gates– puppies can move extremely quickly and dart out doors and on to busy roads before your have even realized they are out. If puppies are going to be loose in rooms that have exterior doors it is a good idea to have some kind of barrier around the door. Xpens work well for this and you can get some very nice decorative (wood) versions if wire pens do not add charm to your décor! Many yard gates

are not puppy proof. Puppies can squeeze through the area between the gate and the post or under the gate.

6. Water hazards – small puppies can drown quite easily. Fishponds, garden water features and toilet bowls are all potential sites for drowning.

What is an Xpen?



A Xpen (Exercise Pen) is a free standing pen made up of multiple panels and a gate. The pens fold for storage and open up into a variety of configurations and provide for mobile containment of your dog. Xpens can be used to create barriers or a large confinement space. I use Xpens as a second layer of security around gates outside and exterior doors when I do not want to risk puppies darting out as I try to get in and out.

Xpens come in a wide variety of formats. Courtyard Kennels are heavier (and more expensive) versions that are more secure and solid. Wooden Xpens and barriers are available as well – but are more likely to be chewed and I find that some have gates that easily pop open.

My 'go to' for confinement is a heavy-duty wire pen (Courtyard Kennel). X pens are OK – but if you are prepared to spend a little more money I recommend upgrading to a "Courtyard Kennel" type of pen. Here is the one I recommend (on sale on Amazon right now).

https://www.amazon.ca/Precision-38-Inch-Courtyard-Kennel-Crackle/dp/B00176I1Y/ref=asc_df_B00176I1Y/?tag=googleshopc0c-20&linkCode=df0&hvadid=292924513641&hvpos=1o1&hvnetw=g&hvrnd=7547622050672883801&hvpone=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=&hvdev=c&hvdvcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9001314&hvtargid=pla-355511970185&psc=1 I recommend getting the 38" high panels. The advantages of

this type of pen are:

- **Durability** – this will last much longer than an Xpen, is less prone to rusting and does not become easily bent like X pens. Courtyard kennels are very sturdy.
- **Flexibility** – it comes in three-foot wide panels – you can use as many or few panels as you want to create the configuration that works for you. It comes with two sets of rods: short ones for using on solid surfaces, and long ones for driving into the ground in case you want to use it outdoors and secure it in place. The long rods also work great to pop a roll of paper towels on to keep them handy but out of the way of puppy curiosity and teeth.
- **Harder to climb out of than an X pen** – I popped Breezie in an Xpen last night when I took her to class and she had climbed out before I took three steps away. The cross bars on the courtyard kennel panels are farther apart than on the Xpen panels so it is a lot more work for them to climb up and over.

A few special mentions:

Xylitol is a common cause of poisoning for dogs and is found in many food products as well as health and beauty products. Sugarless gum contains Xylitol and has been a common source of xylitol poisoning for dogs. Sugarless products like peanut butter are often sweetened with

xylitol. For a list of xylitol containing products <https://www.preventivevet.com/xylitol-products-toxic-for-dogs>

Chocolate is one of the most common poisonings in dogs. Dogs love the sweetness of chocolate and are able to detect it easily by smell. Any chocolate in the home should be kept on in dog proof containers / on high shelves that the dog cannot reach. Poisoning can occur quickly such as when bringing in groceries and leaving a bag by the door while going back to the care for others, or when someone leaves a chocolate bar in a purse or pocket. The darker the chocolate, the higher the risk of serious toxicity but even milk chocolate can be a problem if enough is ingested.

Potato chip and popcorn bags have recently become identified an important cause of suffocation deaths as dogs stick their heads into the bag to get at the last pieces of food. Never let your dog play with empty popcorn or chip bags or any similar products and when discarding them, be sure they are in a secure bin. This can also apply to dog treat bags.

Medications are one of the most common sources of poisonings for dogs.

Essential oils / Aromatherapy products are increasingly being identified as causes of toxicity in dogs even when used as intended. As these products increase in popularity we are learning more about their risks. Some are thought to be safe but we are still learning about these. Essential oils have many biologically active components so should be used with great caution especially around young puppies and if used, should not be used on a continuous basis and should be located as far as possible from where puppy is housed.

In the Garden

Many **plants** are toxic to dogs so take a garden tour to review what you have. Here is a link to a good resources on toxic plants: <https://petcentral.chewy.com/complete-guide-to-poisonous-plants-for-dogs/>. You may want to relocated toxic plants to areas of the garden you can protect from canine access, or remove toxic plants altogether.

In addition to plants – some forms of **mulch** may be toxic to dogs. Cocoa mulch in particular must be avoided as it contains theobromine and smells faintly of chocolate – and is very appealing to dogs. Even non-toxic mulch can also be a hazard if dogs ingest large, non-digestible pieces that may cause obstruction.

Fertilizers contain nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium in concentrations that if ingested may cause gastric irritation. Direct contact to pads can also be irritating. Organic fertilizers such as bone meal, fishmeal etc. are highly appealing to dogs and ingestion can cause gastric irritation. Some products have a tendency to clump in the gut and form concretions that may cause bowel obstruction.

Insecticides / pesticides / rodenticides / slug bait: many of these products act as simple irritants to dogs resulting in GI upset. Others may be highly lethal. It is best to

completely avoid use of such products in areas where your dog could come in contact with residual chemicals.

Herbicides. Acute toxic exposures will usually produce GI upset and sometimes neurologic symptoms. Repeated herbicide exposures have been linked to canine malignant lymphoma.

Compost: In the process of composting, food and vegetable matter decays – a process facilitated by bacterial and fungal organisms. Fungi in decaying foods and vegetation will produce a variety of ‘mycotoxins’. Compost may be particularly attractive to dogs because of the presence of incompletely broken down food products and the smell. Ingestion of mycotoxins in the compost will give risk to symptoms from 30 minutes to 3 hours after ingestion. Common symptoms are high temperature, agitation, tremors, drooling, panting and vomiting. Symptoms can progress to seizures.

Cigarette butts: residual nicotine in cigarette butts can cause severe and fatal nicotine toxicity in dogs. As the cigarette is smoked, nicotine is drawn into and concentrated in the butt. The butt is estimated to contain 25% of the total concentration of nicotine of an unsmoked cigarette. A small dog can develop serious toxicity after ingesting a single butt.

Pools and ponds: Not all dogs are natural and strong swimmers and it IS possible for a dog to drown. Pool safety for dogs should be no different that it would be for toddlers. Pool chemicals should be stored securely away from pet access. Natural ponds may become affected by blue green algae, which is highly toxic to dogs. Dogs that enjoy vigorous play in pools, particularly repeated games of fetch may inadvertently ingest excessive amounts of water leading to bloat and / or water intoxication.

Sprinklers: Many dogs love to play in sprinklers – but watch carefully for behaviours that might allow your dog to ingest water from the spray, hose or sprinkler nozzle. Excessive water ingestion can occur from sprinkler play leading to bloat and / or water intoxication as with pool play. Never leave a dog unsupervised with a sprinkler or hose running.

Making a Dog Friendly Garden: while you are reviewing your yard and garden for canine hazards, why not think about actively making your yard and garden dog friendly by installing safe elements that your dog will enjoy – a digging space, dog safe scented plants and obstacles to climb on like old stumps, childrens’ play structures etc. and safe water features. Here are some articles on creating dog friendly gardens.

- <https://www.bhg.com/gardening/yard/lawn-care/enjoy-a-dog-friendly-lawn/>
- <https://thebark.com/content/8-great-backyard-ideas-delight-your-dog>
- <https://www.sunset.com/garden/backyard-projects/dog-friendly-gardens>