



Two Puppies or One?

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Are you getting a new dog and thinking of adopting two puppies at once? Would that double the pleasure? Could they be company for each other when you're not home? Does it seem a good way to settle competition between human partners or the children in the family over who gets to play with the dog? More dogs, more to go around—does that plan work?

Not exactly. Expert breeders are careful about placing two puppies together in one home, because they know it's very RARE to find a family that understands how much work it is to raise both of them properly. A big red flag if your breeder or rescue group does not have a very lengthy discussion about the problems associated with two pups together. An improperly raised puppy can wind up homeless when the little and cute stage wears off and the defense drives begin to mature. Even dogs who don't become aggressive can become too rowdy for the family, if they weren't given the right training early. Puppies are individuals and each puppy needs a good upbringing. This includes plenty of good experiences with people, places and things. It includes plenty of training and plenty of conditioning to being touched and handled by humans. Most of this work must be done with the puppy one-on-one, away from any other dogs in the household. How is this accomplished?

How to Raise Two Puppies Successfully

Skilled dog trainers and breeders often have the job of raising two puppies at once, so we know a lot about how to do this successfully. Here are some keys to success:

1. Make a careful choice. Dogs who get along as puppies will not necessarily get along at maturity. If you plan to keep your dogs together later (breeders and trainers often keep their dogs routinely separated, all or part of the time), it's important to choose a pair with the best chance of a happy relationship as mature dogs. Most puppies get along, so that tells you nothing about how they will do later. Getting dogs of opposite sex is usually the number one criteria for them to live safely and happily together later. In some breeds it's especially dangerous to keep two of the same sex together, so do your homework if you're considering that. Nature will take its course later, no matter how much you try to get them to love each other. They can love each other literally to the death, especially two females of certain breeds.
2. If you are going to keep the dogs together, plan to spay and neuter them, spaying the female before her first heat. If you want to breed dogs, they will need to live apart at least some of the time. Dogs need to be supervised during matings to prevent injuries, and females should not be bred on every cycle.

Besides that, it's quite possible your two dogs would turn out to be a poor genetic pairing. A male and female dog may be able to live freely together after maturity if both are altered. They actually have a richer social life that way than when used for breeding.

3. The pups need to be trained to rest calmly in separate crates while they are young. Putting two dogs in the same crate causes all kinds of problems, including excessive stress, fighting, and an over-dependence on each other. If there's a mess, both are confined in it. Neither can get away from the other, and that's just not natural for dogs. Plus, they very much need to learn while young that it is safe to be alone. And they need to bond with humans, which is hard for them to do when they spend all their time with another dog.

4. Each pup needs plenty of outings with humans without the other pup. This is an essential part of the pup developing an individual identity and the ability to function without the other one. It also gives the pup a desperately needed opportunity to bond with humans. All dogs need to go out with you for socialization to people, places and things. The difference with two puppies is that you need to do double outings, ideally one per day for each puppy. This process is best continued at least until a year of age, longer for some dogs.

5. Each pup needs to be trained as an individual. When you have one puppy, a lot of training can happen around the house in the course of the day. Having two puppies complicates things. The outings will give you necessary opportunities to train the puppies away from each other. This means separate puppy classes, separate walks, separate feeding times, separate time for one on one play etc. Responsibility in dogs is an individual trait, not a group characteristic. A group of people is a mob and a group of dogs is a pack. A pack will do things you don't want your dogs doing, because their instincts get over-stimulated and a different set of instincts kicks in.

Your best hope of controlling your dogs when they are together is to have an excellent foundation of training with each dog as an individual. Without that, the dogs can get hurt, other animals and people in the household can get hurt, and you can get hurt, too. You need to be able to control each dog with just your voice, not sticking your hands into a situation with teeth flashing. Each dog needs to go to training class weekly without the other dog (many instructors wisely will not let family members train two dogs from the same family in the same class) and practice the class homework daily away from the other dog. As they become well-trained, you'll also want to practice working them together so they also learn to obey with the pack influence.

6. Each puppy needs to be potty trained as an individual. House breaking issues are the most common complaint of families who have two puppies. The puppies are with each other 24 hr a day, they do not know how to exist without the other. This can actually cause developmental delay in some dogs. Their behaviors (like going potty) can be triggered by the other dog. This means each puppy needs to be taken out individually once per hour (so this means YOU are going out once every ½ hr) so the pups learn to eliminate alone, not in the presence of another dog. Each pup needs their own long term confinement area away from the other pup, to be when the dogs cannot be watched

Why It's Hard

Because of the need to separate the dogs for training, for bonding time with humans, and to prevent them from becoming unable to function apart—it's actually more than twice the work to raise two puppies at the same time. Things like housetraining can present huge challenges, too, since the scent of an

accident from one puppy stimulates the other puppy to use the same spot. If you get two males, house-training problems can escalate as they mature. For best housetraining results, try to have males neutered by a year of age at the latest. Research shows it helps at any age, though, so if that time has passed, it's still worth neutering for housetraining and for other reasons, such as prostate health in later life.

We don't necessarily think in terms of "identity" with dogs, but it might help if we did. From human twins it has been learned that too much togetherness can make it difficult for each to develop a healthy sense of identity. Like human twins, dogs sometimes must be separated. If they have not learned to function comfortably as individuals, this can stress them at such times as illness or the death of one of the dogs. It is much kinder to the dogs to develop their separate identities right from the start.

Growing up together does not override normal dog instincts as they mature. You have probably noticed that not all human siblings can get along with each other as adults! The same is true of dogs. It's nature's way for those with leadership qualities to divide up and form separate packs that are small enough to live successfully on the food supplies in each pack's home area.

In the wild when the pups grow up and two don't find a natural pack order with each other, one leaves to join a new pack or form one. But in our homes, our dogs are not free to move out. When they grow up and these problems become apparent, some dogs are not easy to place in new homes. Too many people will only adopt puppies and won't even consider adult dogs. It also hurts the dog's chances of adoption to have a history of fighting and possibly scars.

It's emotionally wrenching for us to give up one of the dogs we've grown to love, too. If you start with a male and a female rather than two dogs of the same sex, this probably will not happen. He can be top male and she can be top female, and they don't have to compete head-to-head. It's still a lot of work, but at maturity they are likely to get along. (That is, unless you have other dogs in the home—in which case, it's going to be even harder to make it work bringing in two pups at once.)

One last concern when you get two pups together is that they will be the same age at the other end of life. It's likely that you will lose them close together. That is extremely tough emotionally on the family. It's much better to space your dog's ages out if you can.

One is Loads of Fun!

It's actually pretty easy to work around the reasons people think it would be better to get two pups than one. The loneliness thing? Dogs sleep about 14 hours a day, often more for puppies. Most of the time you're gone to work is sack-out time for the pup, if you carefully condition the young one to feeling calm in a safe confinement area. Being the only puppy in there, Lucky Pup gets to have goodies it wouldn't be safe to leave with two competitive pups together, even if you need to use a small room or portable exercise pen with Little L at first because of the length of your work day.

Dog walker, pet sitter, day boarding with your veterinarian, friend or relative to watch your pup during the early months until pup can hold it all day? Less expensive for one pup than two, and more friends and relatives willing to do it!

Puppy vaccinations and medical bills? Vaccination costs and some other bills cut in half. Medical bills from one puppy catching something and passing it on to the other puppy cut even more, and ditto for medical costs to repair puppies damaging each other in rough play.

Outings? One puppy can go along where you go much more often, because one puppy is welcome in a lot of places that couldn't handle two puppies. Like oh, say, your relatives' house for a family party. So instead of taking one pup along to that and then thinking up someplace else to take the other pup that day beforehand when you're rushed or afterward when you're tired, you get it done in one. Plus the puppy is with you, not home with no potty access.

At spay/neuter time, you can easily schedule the procedure for the ideal time for this pup, not having to compromise in order to prevent an accidental breeding. You also won't have to worry about separating the pups while each recovers from surgery. (Try doing that for two pups at once—it's like running a hospital ward!)

Bonding with one puppy is easy-peasy when you do the right things. It happens naturally. It's work, yes, but it fits most people's lifestyles much more easily than trying to do the process with two. With good handling and training, your puppy naturally becomes a member of the family.

Enough puppy to go around? For maybe two weeks the kids might compete over who gets to play with the puppy. After that, the "new has worn off," and taking care of the puppy becomes work! The more people in the family to share the labor, the better. Make sure everyone knows exactly what their part is, so people aren't all hoping "someone else" will do it, and the dog goes untrained and uncared for. Raising two puppies at the same time can be done, but...are you sure that's what you want to do? When you do a great job with one puppy, you may be surprised just how much love and enjoyment comes in that one little (but possibly very fast-growing!) package.

