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Introducing a Lab into a New Home

You've finally found your new best friend. After countless hours of research, listening to advice, and decision making, you've picked out that special Lab that you're going to bring into your life. It's time to start having fun, right?

Well, maybe for you. For your new Lab, on the other hand, the hard part is just starting. Try to imagine being suddenly taken from your mother, siblings, and familiar surroundings, and placed in a strange place amongst strange people and possibly other animals. Nothing in this new home is familiar; the sites, sounds, smells are all different. Does this sound stressful to you? You bet! This is what your new pup is bound to experience on the day you bring him home.

There are things you can do to ease your pup's transition into your home. Careful planning for the Big Day (and those that follow) can make a big difference for your puppy when he arrives. Once you have your puppy in your home, a little special care will go a long way.

Getting Equipped

Perhaps the best favor you can do for your puppy is to plan for his arrival before he arrives. Making sure you're completely prepared ahead of time will cut down on the chaos when your Lab arrives, and that will translate into a less stressful environment for him.

You can start by making sure you're properly equipped. Obtain bowls, toys, dog crate, food, and other supplies way ahead of time. Don't scrimp when selecting equipment. Invest in good equipment that will last the dog's lifetime. We recommend stainless steel bowls because they are easy to clean and are chew-proof.

Toys are not optional equipment! All dogs need to play and you can facilitate this need at the same time as ensuring safety by choosing quality toys. Toys will also help to protect your home if your dog is bored and doesn't have a toy, he's likely to make one out of the leg of your couch!

A dog crate (also called a kennel) is an invaluable tool in raising and keeping a dog. We strongly recommend the proper use of a crate. Crate-training your Lab will help you in all kinds of ways, including housebreaking your puppy, and keeping him out of trouble when you're unable to supervise him. More important than all of these advantages, however, is the comfort that a crate can bring to your dog. All dogs have a den instinct and require a special place in your home which they feel they can call their own. The crate fills this need perfectly. There are definitely right and wrong ways to use a dog crate, however, and you should educate yourself on their proper use. For more information on the use of a crate and selecting a crate check out the **Crate Training report on the Resources Page of the Desert Wind Labradors website.** You will need a crate or safety restraint in order to bring your dog home.

If you do choose not to use a crate, you should at least make sure that you provide your Lab with a special place in the house to call his own. A dog bed placed in a comfortable and secure place can fill such a

need. Pick out the spot with care and prepare it ahead of time once your dog moves in, you may have trouble convincing him to change his dens location.

You should also make sure that you have dog food on hand before bringing your new friend home.

Selecting a dog food can be a big research project in and of itself, but for starters, you should maintain your dogs existing diet throughout his transition into your home. Ask your breeder what the dog is currently being fed, and buy that kind of food if at all possible. You can change your dogs diet later on if you wish, but at the moment, he is about to go through enough change as it is.

NOTE: We supply you with a starter bag of food to mix with the food you purchase to ease the transition.

Other supplies you'll want include treats, cleaning supplies (your pup will inevitably make a few mistakes on his way to becoming housebroken), and a leash and collar.

Don't forget to take advantage of other resources when deciding what equipment you'll need. If you purchased your pup, your breeder should be able to give you plenty of advice. Even if you're adopting your Lab, ask a few questions of the attendants at the shelter. They are often as expert as some of the best breeders.

Puppy-Proofing

Puppies can be hazardous to your home. Indeed, just about anyone who has raised a puppy can tell a few horror stories. But it's important to realize that your home can be just as hazardous to your pup! While it's certainly worth worrying about what kind of damage your puppy could do to the leg of your couch, consider the damage that a large piece of ingested upholstery could do to your puppy.

The best solution is prevention. Before your dog arrives home for the first time, go through your entire home and yard and look carefully for hazards and other opportunities for puppy mischief. Make sure that loose items are out of reach. If you have children, point out to them that any toys they leave laying around are likely to become dog toys. Look for electrical wires that are on or near the floor and exposed to chewing, and protect or remove them. Look also for tiny spaces that your pup might be able to crawl into and become stuck, and block them off. If there are areas or rooms in your home that you can't or don't want to puppy-proof, make sure they are completely inaccessible to the dog.

The Puppy Pick-up

Most likely, you'll be driving to pick up your Lab. Therefore, you'll want to make sure that you've prepared your vehicle for your dog in a manner similar to that in which you prepared your house. While we all know many a Lab who will jump at the chance for a car ride, the first car ride in a young dog's life can be a terribly frightening experience. Although many advise putting your dog's crate in your vehicle and crating your dog for the ride home, it must be understood that your puppy has never been alone or in a crate and therefore this is a stressful way to transport unless you are alone in the vehicle. If possible, bring a friend or family member along to help.

When we deliver puppies we typically hold them in our laps until they fall asleep which usually takes only 15-20 minutes and then gently place them on a towel at our feet or in their crate in the backseat.

Make sure to bring along cleaning supplies if your dog becomes carsick, you'll want to pull over and clean up right away.

Be aware that if the ride home frightens your dog, he's likely to break and run when you let him out of the car. Make sure you have him on a leash. Before you take him through that front door, try to get him to eliminate. Not only will it save you from cleaning up, but it will start a good habit early.

The Big Day

You've finally arrived home with your new Lab. The key now is to gently introduce your dog to his new surroundings. No matter how busy your household normally is, try to make your dog's first few days in his new home as low-key as possible. Refrain from having a lot of friends and neighbors over to ogle over your pup. If you have children, ask them to take it easy for a day or two.

Put your dog's crate in the spot where you plan to leave it, and get him acquainted with its location. If the stress gets to be too much for your pup, his crate will provide him with a quiet, safe place to rest. You'll want him to begin establishing his den right away.

Close supervision of the puppy is a must especially during the first few days.

Remember, everything in your home is new to him! You'll need to be around to make sure he doesn't get into trouble. If you can, bring your Lab home on a Friday so that you can spend the weekend with him or, if you work on the weekends, try to select a day to bring home your pup when you can be off work for the next couple days. In addition to being able to keep him out of trouble, you'll also provide a lot of comfort to him during this stressful time just by being around. Even better, you'll be able to start building that all-important bond with your Lab right away. By the way, even after these first few days, it's very important that your dog be allowed to spend plenty of time with you and your family. Dogs are pack animals, and you and your family are your dog's pack. He wants and needs to be with you!

Frequent, scheduled trips outside are important as well. House-breaking your pup can be tricky business, but there's nothing more helpful than giving him plenty of opportunities to do the right thing. You should also establish a feeding schedule right away. You can seek the advice of your breeder in establishing a feeding schedule. If possible, use the same schedule as did your breeder.

Don't be afraid to ease slowly back into your normal lifestyle after a few days. Your new Lab will need to become used to this lifestyle and the sooner he can start, the better.

Bringing Home an Adult Lab

Becoming used to a new home can be just as traumatic for an adult dog as it is for a puppy. In fact, since adult animals are often more set in their ways, the transition may be even more difficult. All the precautions described in this article are as appropriate for adult dogs as they are for puppies.

The important thing to remember about adult dogs is that they are bigger, stronger, more energetic, and generally stronger-willed. What does this mean to you? It means that loose items are not safe on that low coffee table, but need to be even higher off the ground that a simple piece of cardboard will not keep your new dog out of a certain room that physical restraint may be important when making introductions between your new dog and existing pets and that you may need a freezer-size plastic bag instead of a sandwich bag to clean up an accident in the house! Labs are large and energetic dogs, and as adults they need plenty of exercise in the outdoors. You'll need to make sure this is part of your daily schedule with your dog from the start.

A Final Word

Your new Lab can't be expected to learn what's acceptable behavior in his new home unless you teach him. Training is an important part of introducing your dog to your home. Use all the resources available to you in your effort to become a good trainer. Obedience classes, books and videos are great places to start. We encourage you to use training methods which incorporate positive reinforcement principles. These methods are not only more fun for both you and your dog, but we find that they're actually more effective as well.

Finally, don't forget that an important part of your dog's new home is you. There is no substitute for spending quality time with your Lab. What do we mean by quality time? Fun! Play games, go for a walk, or take your dog for a jump in the lake. Above all, enjoy each other's company!