

Training Your Dog to Accept a Muzzle

By teaching your dog to accept a muzzle you will reduce most of the stress of wearing it. Unfortunately, too often people do not introduce a muzzle to their dog until there is a stressful situation that requires its use, such as an emergency trip to the vet when the dog is in pain and frightened.

There are a variety of types of muzzles, from the soft cloth muzzles that vets use for safety in treating their patients to basket muzzles made of leather, plastic, or wire. The soft, cloth type can only safely be used for a few minutes. Though they do allow the dog to open its mouth to breathe, they do not allow the dog's mouth to fully open so it can pant and cool itself. Some of the basket type muzzles also restrict how far a dog can open its mouth. If your dog will be muzzled during activity and/or for prolonged periods of time, be certain that your dog can fully open its mouth to pant and to drink water from a bucket. Below is a photo of a basket muzzle that can be worn when active. As you can see, though the dog's mouth is closed, there is lots of room for him to open his mouth to pant or drink. There is also plenty of padding across the dog's nose to prevent injury from rubbing.



Start with a well-fitting muzzle, as a muzzle of the proper size will be more comfortable. When you first introduce the muzzle, offer a bit of tasty treat held inside the muzzle, encouraging the dog to put its nose into the muzzle to take the treat. Repeat several times until the dog is readily putting its snout inside the muzzle to get the treat. When he is comfortable doing that, you can fasten the straps and continue to offer treats through the muzzle. Feed treats with the straps fastened for only a very short time at first, less than a minute. Remove the muzzle, but only if the dog is not struggling. We want to teach the dog that struggling will not get the muzzle off, but calm acceptance will. It is important that when you fasten the straps, you fasten them very securely. If the dog learns that he is able to remove the muzzle by rubbing and struggling, it will be harder to convince him to

leave it alone. Most dogs will struggle with the muzzle at some point. Usually when the dog realizes that he cannot rid himself of the muzzle, he will accept it.

When the dog calmly accepts wearing the muzzle for less than a minute, you can start to increase the length of time he is wearing the muzzle. Plan to make this several short and positive sessions. How quickly a dog accepts the muzzle depends upon the dog's personality and the owner's willingness to do the training.

A very good quality muzzle will cost more, but will be safer for your dog and will last longer. Purchase a muzzle that straps around the neck, under the throat. One that attaches to the top of the muzzle over the dog's head and between the ears, attaching to the neck strap are the most secure for short snouted dogs. Those muzzles that just strap behind the ears can be rubbed off by a determined dog, even when correctly fitted. Inspect the muzzle to make sure it is in good repair. Do not use a muzzle that is damaged. Check the straps and the basket each time before you put it on your dog. Check the adjustment so the muzzle is secure on the dog.