



## Guide Dogs for the Blind Puppy Raising Department

# Ruff Notes – March 2021 Yard Time for GDB Puppies

Please see the manual documents:

- Confinement (section on yards and fencing) <https://www.guidedogs.com/uploads/files/Puppy-Raising-Manual/Confinement.pdf>
- Exercise and Play <https://www.guidedogs.com/uploads/files/Puppy-Raising-Manual/Exercise-and-Play.pdf>
- Toy Policy <https://www.guidedogs.com/uploads/files/Puppy-Raising-Manual/Puppy-Raising-Toy-Policy.pdf>

Our puppies work hard for us and need to have some R&R time just like we do! It's obvious that higher energy puppies benefit from having a yard or other fenced area to romp in, but yard time is beneficial for all puppies. For some sensitive puppies just regular socialization outings or even neighborhood walks can be a little stressful. Having some time in a fenced area to allows these puppies to decompress on returning from their adventures. Raisers may be surprised to see puppies that have just had a long walk find the energy to race around in the yard! Sometimes this is a puppy's way of "shaking it off" and loosening up after the self-control required on a walk or outing. Some pups may be less energetic and just potter around and sniff; these pups may seem like they aren't candidates for much yard time, but actually these "following the nose and just being a dog" times contribute to the dog's overall well-being.

Raisers that don't have their own yard or access to a safe, fenced area might speak to other puppy club members and see if they can get "yard privileges" a couple of times per week. A neighbor or relative might also be willing to share their yard to let the puppy have some free time. If no fenced area is available, having the pup on a handheld longline (flat collar) in an open space is an acceptable alternative. In this situation the raiser would follow the puppy with minimum interference, letting it have some freedom to wander, so long as it is safe to do so.

### **Age Appropriate**

Baby puppies that may ingest items in the yard such as leaves, twigs and grass should be kept on a leash or line. The pup can be allowed to wander and investigate. Should the puppy pick up vegetation it can be called to the handler, gently reeled in if necessary, and the item exchanged for a food reward. It is best not to make a big deal of removing the item as this can lead to keep-away problems. A little bit of vegetation is not going to harm the pup and we don't want to increase the value of such items to the puppy by grabbing at it. Imagine what happens in the litter when one puppy grabs a "prize" and all the other pups want it – the pup with the prize runs away to keep it!

If the puppy does tend to scavenge:

- Practice lots of hand tether games in the yard and use a high rate of reward (check with the leader if high value food may be appropriate depending on the puppy)

- Do many recall games in the yard using multiple pieces of kibble to reward the puppy
- Have some novel toys around the yard that the puppy can engage with and use lots of praise and positive attention when it interacts with them

As the puppy becomes less interested in scavenging, the line can be dropped and the pup given more freedom, but the raiser should always have food rewards available, and practice recalls frequently. If the puppy is only called when it's time to go inside/go home, it may start avoiding the handler. Lots of recalls with food/toy rewards, then being turned loose to play again, keeps the recall reliable.

### **Running and Romping**

Running and “zoomies” in the yard are allowed. Care should be taken that the puppy can't leap off decks or skid on slippery areas where injury may occur, but otherwise running is a good way to blow off some steam. For some puppies providing a Jolly Ball or plastic jug to bat around and carry will encourage them to exercise more.

### **Relieving**

The puppy should be offered leash relieving before being turned loose in the yard. As per our relieving guidelines, puppies should be relieved on leash, on hard surfaces rather than being turned loose in the yard to relieve at will. However, if the puppy does relieve itself while on recreation time in the yard, it is not counted as an “accident”.

### **Digging**

Puppies that tend to dig should be interrupted and redirected to a toy or another area of the yard. A communication of digging behavior will be sent out separately in the near future.

### **Interaction with Other Dogs**

Dog to Dog Interaction in the manual: <https://www.guidedogs.com/uploads/files/Puppy-Raising-Manual/Dog-to-Dog-Interaction.pdf> See the section on “active play” under “In the Home”

We want GDB puppies to be comfortable interacting with other dogs, but we don't want them distracted in public or obsessed with playing with other dogs in the home. It's all about balancing the amount of interaction according to the puppy's temperament. We find that many puppies raised without other dogs in the household are more dog distracted and may obsessively try to interact with pets when on puppy trades. Too much time spent playing with other dogs can also cause issues; the puppy learns to place higher value on social interactions with dogs over people.

Romping with another dog in the yard is great recreation time for a hard-working GDB puppy. Following the guidelines in the “Dog to Dog Interaction” document, daily play sessions in the yard should not be harmful for most puppies. For pups with no other dogs in the household, if an appropriate playmate can be found for occasional yard romps, it would help develop the pup's doggy social skills. Care should be taken that puppies who become playmates can settle around each other and work/focus on their handlers in each other's presence. Balancing free-play sessions with rewards for calm behavior and training games is a way to keep the relationship healthy for both dogs. Should the puppy become over aroused in play sessions, or seems to be showing more dog distraction, the leader and CFR should be consulted.

We want our puppies to have some time to just be dogs! Playing in a yard even a few times a week could make a difference for puppies that are a little anxious, stressed, shut down or very energetic. Please check with your leader/CFR if you have any questions.