

A Very Early Training Technique

Borzoi by nature are usually a discreet breed. When given the chance they will go to the farthest point of their runs to relieve themselves. While at home this clean habit is appreciated, when travelling it can become a chore of endless walking just to find that right spot. I remember watching from my 12th floor room in a downtown Chicago hotel, friends walking their borzoi down Lake Shore Boulevard for hours just to get their borzoi to relieve themselves. That picture is not the idea of fun at a dog show. An unintended benefit of a little trick I learned to keep the whelping box clean resulted in a huge time saver.

In order to keep the whelping area clean and smelling fresh, we started making an area outside the whelping box a giant kitty litter. As soon as the puppies are on their feet and crawling, we extend the whelping box with an area right outside that is full of pine and cedar shavings. The area is about four feet by four feet. We use shavings that are pet approved. Puppies will try and get out of the box to relieve themselves when they can. The shavings absorb the urine and make it easy to pick up the feces. You have to be diligent and clean the area daily. As the puppies become more active and coordinated we start moving the shaving box farther away from the whelping box. We keep it just about the maximum distance that a puppy can run to when waking up and still hit the shavings in time. As time progresses, we continue to move the shaving box further away. By four to five weeks you have a mad dash of puppies running to get to the shaving box as soon as they wake or finish feeding.

Once the puppies are weaned, and before they are moved outside we put Vari Kennels in place of the whelping box. Early morning is a tangle of legs and puppies in the Vari Kennel followed by a horse race to the shaving box. Eventually to help them get the idea when they are moved outdoors, we sprinkle pine shavings at the end of the puppy runs. The pattern is quickly repeated outside as they run from their kennel to the find the pine shavings in their run. Before you know it they are house trained.

The unintended consequence is that all of our dogs have no problem later in life going on sawdust. Also, sleeping in a Vari Kennel is a no-brainer. On a trip to Westminster, we were dreading the idea of just where are these discreet dogs of ours going to go when we stay across from Madison Square Garden in New York City. Well, we found out that in the basement of the Pennsylvania Hotel, they had an indoor ex-pen area. The dogs entered (now older adults) were from one of the first litters we used the pine shaving technique. Fretting the whole issue, we reluctantly headed down the service elevator to the overcrowded but beautifully decorated pine shaving haven for the hotels four legged guests. Voile! Success! One smell of the pine shavings, and it was home sweet home. Nothing sticks with a dog like fond memories from puppyhood. The best part, we now had an extra hour to find a great restaurant for dinner.

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