



## THE SMALL DOG DIFFERENCE

For The BCW

*By Barbara Kahn*

I've owned 'em all: big dogs, medium-sized dogs and little itty bitty dogs. Don't let anyone tell you that little dogs are just like big ones except for their size. Tiny dogs have an entirely different perception of the world and the creatures in it. Distances are farther away. People and things appear taller. Moving objects often seem threatening. Other dogs may appear dangerous.



There are definite advantages to owning small dogs. They're accepted in many apartment complexes that have size limits on pets. They're eminently portable and can travel easily. Small dogs cost less to feed, to medicate, to groom, to board. Small dogs are likely to satisfy their owners' need to baby them.

And, naturally, there are some distinct disadvantages. Small dogs are more delicate and more likely to be injured by accident. Housetraining a diminutive dog may be challenging.





Many of them have tiny internal organs that need to be emptied at very short intervals. Some are weather-phobic, only willing to venture outdoors when the temperature is 60 degrees or more and the sun is shining. Some come to us genetically or environmentally geared toward soiling indoors. Patience, persistence and correct management is the name of the game with these pint-sized pooches.

Training and relationship building take on a different aspect with the small dog. When we instruct most dog owners not to allow their untrained dogs on furniture and beds, we know that toy dog owners are far less likely to abide by those rules. After all, we selected toy dogs in part because we wanted to baby them. Some small dogs end up with challenging attitudes and behaviors because so little is expected or required of them. And many end up being difficult because they become defensive



and their owners put up with behaviors that would never be tolerated in larger dogs such as sloppy housetraining, jumping on people, walking poorly on leash, running off when approached, snapping at people or other dogs and barking at everything that moves. Those behaviors are generally enough to get a large breed dog relegated to the yard or

worse. With little dogs, we just pick 'em up, tuck 'em under our arms, laugh and grow resigned to their idiosyncrasies.

When obedience training the small dog, approaches should be somewhat different from training a larger dog. If our little ones have short attention spans and are easily distracted, we need to increase the difficulty of our exercises more gradually. Training for shorter periods of time but more frequently is helpful.





We may need to begin some lessons sitting on the floor alongside the dog or elevating her onto a table (and carefully supervising her while she's up there) until she understands what we expect. As with any dog, we must do many, many repetitions of each behavior before we can expect the dog to comply dependably with a command, especially in distracting environments. As owners, we will need extra patience, a calm attitude, a great sense of humor and a commitment to ending up with a well-behaved dog. Socially appropriate behavior is not size-dependent. It is dependent on our expectations and our willingness to take the time and make the effort to get the job done right!

While some people feel small dogs don't need to be trained, at WonderDogs we actually devote a class specifically to the Teeny Weenies. In that class, our small dog techniques are explained and taught in a safe environment without the potential threat of larger dogs in close proximity. We expect our small dogs to be well-behaved and we teach them how to be just that! After all, we know how smart and clever they are. All they need from us is to be educated. Once our tiny ones learn how much fun it is to use their energy for activities that can be enjoyed by them and their families, they are every bit as smart, compliant and obedient as their larger counterparts.

**So don't let your little dog become a brat.** Just because your dog is tiny doesn't mean she can't be a joy to live with. Teach gentle, humane techniques and find an instructor who likes and is experienced with small dogs.

