

STARTING A WEIM PUP IN THE FIELD

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Whether you live in the city, have limited time, or lack experience (all things that pertained to me when I first started), starting a Weimaraner puppy in the field is something that any active Weimaraner owner can accomplish whether your goal is to make your puppy a future field trial competitor who will later be campaigned by a pro, a personal hunting dog, or an occasional hunt test competitor that you want to handle yourself.

So, throw away the term “training” for now; we are going to talk about “exposure” and “conditioning.” Everything we do with a puppy is to prepare him for adulthood and give him the best chance to reach his full potential. The good news is that it’s almost exclusively about fun in the first year, and you don’t need a bunch of gear, a horse or even a shotgun. OK, there might be occasion where you might want to borrow some of these things, but we’ll get there when we get there! 😊



Your first order of business is to bond with your pup. Socialize him. Teach him basic house manners and recall. Play retrieving games. Did I mention socialize him? Take him everywhere and let him experience life. He should be exposed to as many new things as possible, including running in different fields. If you are in a rural area, this is easy. In the city, you can take him to

a local park in the early morning when no one else is around. Find some hiking trails, a wildlife area, an undeveloped lot or business complex. Be creative!

You’ll spend much of the first year “happy timing” with your puppy, as Delmar Smith calls it. Take your puppy to one of the few fields you have identified and let him run off leash. The first few times, you will be stumbling over your puppy. Ignore him if he sticks by your side and keep walking. Soon he will get bolder and venture farther from you. Remember, your pup can do no wrong. Chasing tweety birds, sniffing rodent holes, chasing rabbits, rolling in mud, picking up sticks – great! Find terrain where he has to cross a creek, jump over some downed trees

or cross a gully. He is gaining confidence. Identify at least one place where you can expose your puppy to birds and gunfire safely. Even in the most urban areas, you can usually find a suitable place within a couple hours' drive. Inquire with other Weimaraner owners or those involved with other pointing breeds. NAVHDA is also an excellent resource, as well as your local hunt club. The area should be wild enough to have cover and some critters around even if there are no wild game birds there. (In other words, a big grassy park would be a poor choice.) In most cases, you will have to use pen raised birds for your puppy's first bird exposures so that you can ensure bird contact.



Cortunix or Japanese quail can sometimes be found at feed stores. These birds hardly fly and are perfect for little puppies. If you cannot find these at a feed



store, ask other Weimaraner or pointing breed owners to see where you might be able to purchase quail. Many dog trainers like to use pigeons for training, so if quail are hard to find, pigeons will work too. If you have to use a bigger bird like a pigeon, you can pluck some flight feathers if necessary to impede flight. You can also tie their wings together to keep him from flapping too much, or dizzy the bird to keep him in one place. Planting birds takes skill and practice. If necessary, get help with your puppy's first bird introductions. The important thing to keep in mind is the size of the bird, its strength and your puppy's confidence level around birds before putting him a situation that might potentially scare him; use your common sense here. 😊

Hopefully, your breeder has already exposed your puppy to birds. If not, you will probably have to show him a bird and let him have it in his mouth. You may need to do this even if your puppy has seen a bird before. Start with a dead bird. Tease him with it and let him mouth it. If you throw it and he pounces on it, you can move on to live birds. If he seems tentative, then continue letting him play

with a dead bird. He should be completely confident around birds and absolutely love them. You may see him act possessively with the bird, tear it up or even eat it. That's fine, and they are all signs that he's absolutely confident around them. If he seems hesitant in any way, then let him get confident at his own pace. ANYTHING you do around birds MUST be positive.

You will be surprised at how quickly most puppies will "turn on" and be ready for more after the first introductions! And whatever you do, avoid scaring him around birds at all costs! Don't use large birds like pheasants initially – they can be scary to a little puppy. Even a pigeon who flaps a wing in a puppy's face at a bad time can imprint bird fear, so do be careful that you give your puppy the best experience possible.

Once he knows that birds are wonderful, plant one or two for him, slightly dizzying it if necessary to keep the bird down in one spot. But do not dizzy the bird so much that he cannot get up and fly. Birds may get up and fly well before you are ready, a frustrating experience, but this is far better than birds that your puppy catches!

Cut your puppy loose and walk with him. Shirley Hansen of Outdoors Kennels has started many Weimaraner puppies and cautions that we must stay with our puppies, walking behind them, when we have them out running in a field. Pay attention to your dog. When you are hunting or testing your dog, you will be focused on him, watching his body language. He knows your eyes are on him. By staying with him, you are building teamwork and you are also building trust. Your puppy needs to know that you won't go running off on him – on the same token, you must trust that your puppy won't run off either. Resist the urge to talk to your puppy, and keep your mouth shut. You will break his concentration, and your talking will encourage him to come back to you and stick by your side rather than hunt ahead of you. Don't worry, your puppy will not run away!

In the beginning, you may have to guide him into his birds. Always be aware of the wind direction, and walk your pup across or into the wind. If the wind is blowing on your back and your pup is moving away from you, then you are not positioning your pup well to locate the bird.



Whether he points the bird, roots it up, or even loses interest quickly, is not of great concern at this time. Just continue to keep it positive, even puppies that are shy in the beginning will try to get the bird once their prey drive turns on. If he points, let him figure it out, don't flush the bird. It is between him and the bird. Be sure to use your best flying birds because you do not want him catching birds! It is no big deal if he does, but do what you can to keep caught birds to a minimum to nil!

When he chases and is in FULL pursuit of the bird and he is far away from you, fire your blank pistol. Work up to a shotgun over several sessions, always paying attention to the way the puppy is reacting to the sound. A small pause in chase, a head turn, even the most subtle hesitations are signs that you might be pushing the progression too fast.

Gun shyness and bird shyness are both very difficult for a dog to overcome, so it is best to err on the side of caution. Have an experienced person help you if you are unsure of how to do this properly.



Teach your pup to swim when the weather gets warm. Find a pond that has a gentle incline into the water. You can encourage your pup to swim by having him follow other dogs, or by getting in yourself and having him follow you. You can toss a dead bird into the water to entice him to swim as

well. Get our primer [here](https://justweimaraners.com/swimming-a-primer-for-weims/). (https://justweimaraners.com/swimming-a-primer-for-weims/)

Sometime around six to 12 months is a great time to take him on his first hunting trip on wild birds. An average well bred six month old puppy with the proper exposure and experience behind him will be sufficiently independent to find wild birds on his own. This is season is for your puppy – NOT YOU. He will be goofy, and you may not be able to shoot all that much, but he can do no wrong. The only rule is to shoot only the birds he points. He is learning more than you can ever teach him by just experiencing this, and even if you have no intention of ever hunting over your Weimaraner again, wild birds will teach him more than

any trainer can in the same number of sessions. It is worth taking any opportunity to have your pup work wild birds.



Your puppy will change a lot through the first year you have him. The eight week old puppy that was glued to your side, the same one you stumbled over, with consistent positive exposure will be a bird finding machine by a year old. Just by running your pup a few times a week and exposure to birds a few times a month, and one hunting season, your pup will have learned confidence in himself and in you, where to find birds, how to cover terrain, how to search, how to use the wind, how to use his nose. He will love birds and gunfire. He will point and retrieve and swim and will be primed and ready to learn more. He will have the foundation for formal training whether you plan on continuing on yourself or if you plan on sending your puppy to a professional trainer.

Have fun!

Photos in this article are courtesy of Vbird Studios and Southpaw Weimaraners.