

Instructions



The WordchipperSM

by Larry Gauper • #263

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Our kids and their families love their dogs. As I've reported in this column, I "dog-sat" on two different occasions this year for my son's family in suburban Las Vegas and, in between, for my daughter's family in the sunny Tampa Bay area. To say these pets are pampered is an understatement, but when you consider that Americans will spend over \$47 billion on pet food and supplies this year, our kids certainly aren't the only ones who really care for their dogs.

Last February during one of our visits to Florida, JoAnne and I were asked to take care of Mia, a beautiful golden retriever, for about a week. My daughter left truly detailed instructions as to what Mia would require. On a neatly typed sheet placed on the kitchen counter, I found the following:

In the morning I rinse out her bowls and give her fresh water with ice. For meal #1, put about 5 or so apple chunks in her bowl and then add 3 level scoops of dry dog food and then on top add 1 tablespoon of wet food. Make her sit and then tell her "ok" when she is allowed to eat.

Trust me, this isn't just *any* dog food: this is *Orijen*. The company's website says "We sell only what we make ourselves. All of our foods are produced in our own award-winning factory here in Alberta, Canada. Our fresh regional ingredients include free-run chickens, turkeys and ducks, whole Grade A eggs, free-range wild boar, bison and heritage pork, grass-fed lamb, and a variety of wild-caught freshwater & saltwater fish—all farmed or fished within our region, passed 'fit for human consumption' and delivered FRESH TO OUR DOOR. Each & every day!"



We were told to give Mia the same meal, #2, at around 3:30 p.m. My daughter's written instructions continued:

She can have a couple of treats during the day; I labeled those and put them in the plastic container.

She generally has two good walks a day, usually in late morning and then around 5:00 p.m., after her food has digested a bit. Mia (around one-year old at the time) still likes to jump on people when she meets them...I'm sorry...I have tried turning my back to her but then she jumps on your back so I really need to work on that. If you see someone coming near you, bring the "flex leash" close to you. Don't be afraid to say "no!" if she's doing something you don't like.

When I leave, I fill her water bowl with ice and I make sure she has a couple of (treat-type) bones to chew on. Lay a couple of treats on her pillow and then quietly shut the door to her crate. Say "good girl" and then leave. I try not to make a big production out of it; this helps to relax her. If she has just gone potty she will be good for at least 6 hours (hey, she does a lot better than this gramps!). I prefer not to leave her that long, but if you have to, it's fine.

Her last "let-out" is around 8:30 p.m. and then she is usually ready for bed. If she gets a bit squirrely, you'll have to be firm with her (my wife does the same with me) and tell her "off" if she jumps on the bed. Give her one of her toy bones to chew on and lay it in her brown bed (this comfy little number has Mia's name embroidered on it). If she is running around in circles like a nut (not unlike ol' gramps here, at times) and getting wild, just say "Mia, sit!" and she usually will stop for a moment to do this. Then, you can pet her. This usually calms her down. Don't hesitate to call if you have questions about anything.

These instructions were followed by four cell phone numbers for family members, plus a number for Mia's regular vet and an "emergency vet's" phone number. Fortunately, we didn't have to call any of them, except to give my daughter a positive report.

Ultimately, Mia got along well in our temporary custody, as did Cinder earlier this year in Las Vegas. From these experiences, I learned that, to many people, dogs are truly "members of the family." Although they obviously don't require the same amount or kind of love one would give a child, their need for attention is almost as great—something to consider if you're thinking about acquiring a pet.