



Alamo Retriever Club
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TEACHING HOLD

Probably the most tedious task one has when training a retriever is teaching a dog to “hold”. Without a good hold, all kinds of problems crop up doing a retriever’s working life. There are a great variety of techniques to teach “hold” but almost all of them use similar ideas. Some of the books and DVDs in the Club’s resource library describe these methods. The following is a very detailed description of one such method of how some of our club members have successfully taught “hold” and the companion command “drop”

Goal of Teaching Hold

- ⦿ Teaches the dog to have “GOOD MANNERS” when they have a bird / bumper in their mouth
 - No dropping until told
 - No mouthing
- ⦿ Initial part of a trained retrieve sequence
 - Several different force fetch or forceless fetch programs out there, a whole other topic

Pre-Requisites

- ⦿ A pup with a good attitude
- ⦿ A pup that has a good bond with trainer
- ⦿ Formal obedience (80% or better)
 - Sit, Heel, Here
 - Collar Conditioned not necessary
- ⦿ No teething pain

Frame of Mind

- ⦿ Done correctly, no force needed at this point, WE ARE TEACHING
- ⦿ Reinforcing or correcting obedience commands (sit, here, heel) is acceptable, but should not be necessary
 - If correcting the obedience commands becomes a distraction to the learning of new material, then back up and review obedience before continuing to teach hold

Location

- ⦿ Some people use a force fetch table for the entire process
- ⦿ I personally prefer a quiet room of the house free from distractions to start with
- ⦿ Then move to other locations such as nature walks and training days as the dog progresses

5-10 Minute Training Sessions

2 – 3 Times Per Day

- ⦿ Get them in a good attitude
- ⦿ Review some obedience
- ⦿ Review something they already know
 - **Simplify** if necessary
- ⦿ Make baby steps towards teaching something new
 - **Simplify** if necessary
- ⦿ Review something you know they will be successful with
 - **Simplify** if necessary
- ⦿ End with a good attitude

Items Needed

- ⦿ Flat buckle collar
- ⦿ Leather glove (or not)
- ⦿ Paint roller or Dowel Rod / Buck
- ⦿ Bumper
- ⦿ Optional
 - Other items to hold
 - Force fetch table
 - Five gallon bucket or similar to sit on

Starting w/ Gloved or Bare Hand

- ⦿ Some people skip this step and are successful too, but this step has helped me to learn how to “read the dog”
- ⦿ Corrections can be subtle, perfectly timed, and accurate
 - Pay attention to tongue pressure

Step 1

- ⦿ Put the flat collar on your pup.
- ⦿ Just loose enough that you can slip your left hand underneath the collar, this will give you full control of the pups head.
- ⦿ Make sure it's not too tight; you don't want to choke the dog.
- ⦿ Don't let go of the dog with your left hand until this session is over.

Step 2

- ⦿ Now with the leather glove on your right hand command FETCH.
- ⦿ Insert your fingers behind the dog's canine teeth until your whole hand is in the pup's mouth.
- ⦿ You want the dog's tongue to be hitting the palm of your hand with your thumb on one side and your fingers on the other. Then, gently grab a hold of the lower jaw.
- ⦿ Make sure your hand is not pressing their gums against their teeth at this point

Step 3

- ⦿ The pup is going to try to do whatever it can to get your hand out of its mouth. **DO NOT LET GO OF THE LOWER JAW** and continue to say **HOLD**.
- ⦿ They will eventually give in and accept your hand being in their mouth. This could take 5, 15, 30 seconds or longer but they will give in and once they stop struggling say **GOOD**.
- ⦿ Wait an additional 2 to 3 seconds and command **DROP**. Remove your right hand from the dog's mouth.
- ⦿ At this point you can praise the dog with "good dog"

Step 4

- ⦿ Wait 10 seconds or so and repeat this process 5 to 6 more times
 - You may find it useful to rotate 90 degrees on your bucket so the dog is in a slightly different location
- ⦿ Each time make the pup hold your hand a little bit longer than the previous
- ⦿ Once the dog is comfortable with your hand in their mouth for roughly 10 to 15 seconds it's time to move onto the paint roller.

Step 5

- ⦿ Continue to use your left hand to hold onto their collar.
- ⦿ Place your right hand in front of the dog's mouth with the paint roller in the palm of your hand.
- ⦿ Command FETCH. Now, work your fingers into the dog's mouth. Once the dog opens its mouth push the paint roller into their mouth with your thumb.
- ⦿ You may find it easier to use your left hand to open their mouth and then put the paint roller in with your right hand

Step 6

- Once the paint roller is inside the dog's mouth, hold the paint roller in their mouth until they stop struggling.
- DO NOT LET THEM SPIT THE PAINT ROLLER OUT!
- They will eventually give in and accept the paint roller being in their mouth, like they did with the glove. Continue to say HOLD.

Step 7

- ◉ Once they stop struggling to spit out the roller, slowly start to take your hand away.
- ◉ Keep saying HOLD; be ready to push the roller back into their mouth if needed.
- ◉ You may find that “cuffing” the pup lightly on the bottom of the jaw just as they start to roll the bumper will be just enough pressure to get them to hold politely
- ◉ Once your pup holds the roller for 2 or 3 seconds with no issue, give your release command, and take the roller from their mouth
- ◉ At this point you can praise the dog again with “good dog”

Step 8

- Repeat as before to increase the duration of the hold
- When the pup will hold it continuously for 15 to 20 seconds without any rolling or drops you can now check and make sure they are holding firmly enough

Step 9

- ⦿ This time, when you reach for the paint roller, instead of saying drop, say hold again.
- ⦿ Make sure they don't drop the paint roller just because they anticipate time to drop it.
- ⦿ Remind them to hold while lightly tapping on the bumper.
- ⦿ Remind them to hold while gently pulling on the bumper.

Step 10

- ◎ Repeat the process again with a regular bumper
 - Progress should be pretty quick by now
- ◎ Optionally, other things can be used to teach hold and to challenge the newly learned skills
 - Water Bottle – half full of water
 - Water Bottle – half full of rocks
 - Dockens – small to large
 - Frozen Birds
 - quail, pigeon, teal, pheasant, mallard
 - Thawed Birds
 - Same sequence
 - Hammer

Challenging Hold

⦿ Remote Sit

- Walk in front of dog
- Walk around dog
- Walk out of sight of dog
- With Distractions and Diversions

⦿ Heel with Dog

- Probably need a leash to help encourage them forward
- Be ready to prevent them from dropping the bumper as soon as they start to move
- Also heel backwards

Polishing the Delivery

- ⦿ Start with a remote sit and walk 2-3 yards in front of the pup
- ⦿ Tell the dog to heel, and make sure that they don't drop the bumper as they heel into position
 - Expect perfection, but ensure success
- ⦿ After they heel and sit down politely, then tell them to drop
- ⦿ Work out to about 20-30 yards or more
 - Enough distance where the dog gets to a full run bringing it back to you

Closing Thoughts

- ⦿ This process from start to finish can be taught in about a week, but don't be afraid if it takes longer, every dog progresses differently.
- ⦿ It is important to establish a solid foundation for future training to be built upon.
- ⦿ Many very successful “meat dogs” have gone to the field for their first season with little more training than what has been described to this point

