

My Secret to Training Difficult Pups

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Tikiline Beagles

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I've been asked several times how I start difficult pups. Most pups with any hunting breeding at all start to trail rabbits on their own between 5 or 6 months of age regardless of what they are exposed to. However, every now and then I get in a pup to start that simply doesn't want to have anything to do with rabbits, even to the point of being terrified of them. Often these are pups raised as family pets until they are old enough to be trained. They are sometimes even shy house pets that haven't been leash trained. These conditions put a lot more work on me to get them compared to what most pups take. Making the situation worse, some folks want to wait until right before hunting season in the fall and are anxious to get updates on progress daily.

I usually start by getting the pup used to me, it's kennel conditions, and the leash. Running with trained hounds sometimes works, but you risk training a pup to follow other hounds rather than learn on their own. I can only do so much so here is the secret I use as a last ditch training effort when all else fails.

I start by tying the pup with at least a 6' to 8' leash or rope to a small tree with a rabbit in a small wire cage just out of reach. The pup can see and smell the rabbit but not reach it. At first the pup may be terrified of the rabbit but at least they will recognize the smell plus it won't take long for the pup to figure out that a rabbit isn't something to be afraid of.

After the pup gets used to the rabbit, or if they aren't timid of the rabbit at all, slowly drag the rabbit away and out of sight a few times. Each time you do follow a different path.

Immediately after dragging, leave the caged rabbit out of site, go back, and walk the pup to where the rabbit is hiding. Keep slowly pulling the pup back on the line until the rabbit is found. Make a big deal out of finding the rabbit and then lead the pup back to the starting point and tie it up. Take the rabbit back and slowly drag it away again over a different line to another location. You may need to do this several times over a couple of days until the hound knows what is expected. Repeat this until the pup starts to use its nose to locate the rabbit. You do not want the pup to see where you hide the rabbit as it will simply go there and never but its nose down. Also, always drag the rabbit while caged as this will reduce wear and tear on the rabbit. I use a small live rabbit trap. The figure shows my technique.

The final step is to take the pup out after dark when the scent is high and when it can't get a sight chase. You can lay a longer drag ahead of time or just attempt to locate a wild rabbit. In my starting pen, I walk these pups around my feeders.

Once the pup is taking a line on its own using its nose you can work it as needed. I don't like giving a sight chase to start a hound like some folks do as this tends to keep a hound from using its nose that much when hunting.

