

Let's Hear it For The Boys!

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By Dr. Tracie Laliberte

Citing the difficulties associated with keeping both genders I have lost count of the number of times that I've heard fellow Cavalier breeders say, "He's my pick puppy, but I don't keep boys and no one else does either, so he's going to a pet home." I used to keep my mouth shut and my opinion to myself about such matters . . . until recently. Now I respond with honesty. Placing the best quality puppy from a litter in a pet home because of an aversion to his outside plumbing does a disservice to a breeder's commitment to improving the breed. Of greater significance is how the atrophy of available quality males contributes to the bigger problems of popular sire syndrome and the diminishing gene pool. These are issues that impact breed preservation.

Throughout my life as a purebred dog enthusiast, I have

always kept both males and females intact. With good dog management in a structured environment, housing both genders is not that difficult.

I enjoy the companionship of my dogs. They live pet lives together with me in my home. Everyone gets to watch TV in the living room, pan-handle snacks in the kitchen, and take turns sleeping in bed. Everyone gets along; males don't mark in the house; and the girls are supervised during seasons.

I monitor the girls' heat cycles in three ways. First, I keep a list on the refrigerator of each girl's last season for quick reference. Next, if I notice that one of the boys is sniffing a girl's hindquarters more than usual, or if a boy is showing mounting interest (no pun intended!), I wipe the crease of the girl's vulva with a white tissue to check for brown or red discharge. Additionally, I pay attention

to the odor of the boys' urine. When a girl comes into season, male urine develops a musky odor. If I smell a musky male, I check the girls' reference list on the refrigerator and tissue test all candidates daily if the males continue to smell strong.

When I do have a girl in season, I divide the kitchen in half to create a separate area from the males for the duration of her heat. I also create a separate potty area in the yard. I find that the trick to the separate areas is to double gate them so that there is a buffer zone between the girls and boys. The goal of the space lock is to prevent the boys from having contact with girl fluids. Girls in season are put out last, and privately. By using this method, I find that the boys pay little or no attention when the girls are cycling, except for the 2-3 days during ovulation. During this prime time, boys may become vocal when they see me carry the girl outside to her potty

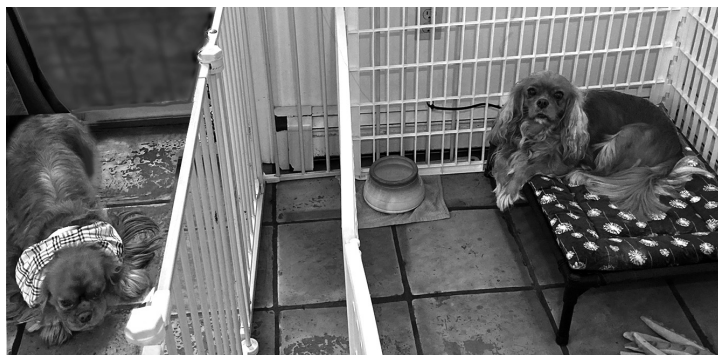
area. If there is any high drama, a slight spritz of aerosol Dial deodorant to the girl's skirt usually quells the chorus.

For added peace of mind, I crate the girl in season in her gated kitchen area when I'm out of the house and when I'm unable to have eyes on the boys. Additionally, folks who regularly visit my home know that a pink bandanna tied to the kitchen and outdoor expens as well as a pink collar signify a girl in season.

The need for folks to reconsider their male husbandry practices is clear. I recently judged a specialty where there were twice as many female exhibits as male. Sadly, if I was looking for a compatible female to breed to my girl in my geographic area, I would be spoiled for choice. But until science allows for this type of pairing, I'm going to have to continue to stand on my soapbox and shout "Let's hear it for the boys!"



The double-gated potty area with buffer zone.



The kitchen divided in half with buffer zone

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