



Every Dog Deserves A Crate

St. Michael Veterinary Clinic

One of the most useful devices for raising a puppy, and perhaps one of the most misunderstood, is a dog crate. A puppy is safe in the crate and unable to be hurt by jumping, falling, or eating something harmful. It can also save hundreds of dollars in damage to household items. Since the crate is portable, it can be easily taken along on trips. Thus, overnight visits or vacations with the family pet can be more enjoyable. People who raise, train, and show dogs have been aware of the benefits of crates for years.

In the wild, when young cubs are isolated from their pack, they become very emotional and begin whining, barking or howling. If they are trapped in deep brush, they'll dig and chew in order to free themselves and be reunited with the pack. These behaviors are genetically based and increase the chances they'll survive. The family dog has retained these tendencies, and that's why the puppy may become highly emotional if left alone. Chewing, scratching and nervous elimination can be expected to occur if the pup experiences stress due to isolation.

❖ SECURITY:

The crate will be your dog's house, his home, when he is in your house or traveling. Select the right size crate. A crate should be just large enough for your dog to stand up in, lie down in a comfortable position, and not much more. Be sure to buy the size for your dog when full-grown.

❖ HOUSEBREAKING:

No animal likes to sleep, or be confined in an area he has soiled, so he will make every effort to wait until you let him out of his crate. And he will let you know when he needs to go out. Whenever you cannot actually keep the pup in sight, put him in the crate. At night put the crate close enough so you can hear the pup crying in the crate if he cannot wait any longer.

❖ HOUSETRAINING:

The crate has the immediate benefit of reducing isolation induced stress. Even after your pup is housetrained and familiar with his new surroundings, you'll want to restrict him to his den when no one is around to watch him, because the normal, healthy pup will cause some mischief if unattended. The tendency to learn about his surroundings is too strong to control, and learning means chewing, scratching, and digging. If your puppy isn't able to get into trouble, destructive habits won't be formed.

❖ TRAVELING:

The crate is most essential here. First, you are taking the dog's home with him, so wherever you place his crate; he has a sense of security. If you should lose your dog, leave his crate at the place he ran away from.

Always crate your dog when transporting him, for his safety. He is much more likely to be injured in an accident if not in a crate.

STEPS IN CRATE TRAINING

- A. Acquire a den that will be large enough to house the pup after he's full-grown. As an adult he should be able to lie comfortably on his side as well as stand, sit and turn around without difficulty.
- B. Set it up with the dog out of the room, so as not to startle him. If he's not housetrained, and if he's not already accustomed to being inside the house, you should put the den in your bedroom at night. By doing this, you'll provide social contact, and will also be able to tell by his restlessness if he needs to eliminate.
- C. If you're using a wire crate, place an old blanket or sheet over the top and sides in order to create a den-like atmosphere. Take care to tuck or tape the ends of the covering under the crate so that he can't pull them inside to chew. Put it in a room you can make dark, and have a radio handy.
- D. When it's time for his feeding, place the bowl just outside the den, leaving the gate open. Make sure nothing startles him.
- E. Between feedings, place several small pieces of food inside the den while he's watching. If he attempts to eat the food, praise him after he does so. If he hesitates, just ignore him and leave the food in the den.
- F. At his next feeding time, place his food bowl just inside the den. Place it on a towel or tape it to the den floor to prevent sliding.
- G. Repeat step E between feeding.
- H. For the next feeding time, place the bowl well inside the den. By this time he should be accustomed to it and not hesitate to enter. Shut the gate while he is eating. Feed this way one more time.
- I. After he is finished eating let him out and wait 30 minutes. Go get him, don't call, and put him inside the den. Shut the gate, darken the room and turn on the radio. He may begin scratching, barking and whining to get out.
- J. As soon as he begins to act up, completely cover the den, and then leave the area. **DON'T SAY ANYTHING.** After he has been quiet for two continuous minutes, open the gate. Don't fuss over him at this time or you'll be encouraging him to want to leave the den. Watch him closely as he may have to eliminate soon.
- K. Continue to work with him, but only between his regular feeding times, using pieces of his food or small treats. No longer feed in the den. Don't call or ask him to go inside. Pick him up and place him in the crate while praising. Gradually build up the time he's inside and quiet during the day. Before leaving remember to have the room as dark as possible and turn the radio on loud enough to mask outside noises that may excite or disturb him.
- L. Give him a treat **EACH TIME** he enters the den for confinement. You can start associating the command "Kennel" with this action. Except when he awakens and fusses because he needs to eliminate, make sure you never let him out of the den when he's acting up, or you'll be encouraging him to continue to do so. Also, remove his collar before putting him in the den, as you don't want him to become accidentally entangled.

PRO AND CONS

This procedure has several advantages for house-training puppies. First of all, the pup does not form the habit of eliminating inside the house. People who barricade the pup in the kitchen or some other area must also provide newspapers to absorb the waste. The pheromones contained within the urine and feces are then transferred to the surface of the floor. This can influence the dog to eliminate in that area at a later date. Second, the pup can be placed in its "den" when it cannot be watched during the day. Destructive habits, as well as eliminating inside the house, can be further controlled. Third, the separation reflex is inhibited, thus curtailing possible side effects related to stress.

The procedure does have some disadvantages. A young pup should not be placed in its crate for prolonged periods of time. During the day, the limit should be two to three hours at a time. This is because of frequent periods of activity that occur throughout early development, as well as frequent elimination responses.

Clients who are gone for extended periods must provide the pup with a larger, damage-proof area. The procedure described above can be used to control the separation reflex. However, an area for elimination must be provided within the enclosed area, as well as food and water, according to the length of absence. A pup should not be isolated for extended periods of time, even within a damage-proof area, unless absolutely necessary. Isolation can have negative effects on a pup's psychological development.

A pup that has been successfully crate-trained will prefer resting in its "den". As the pup matures it will voluntarily seek out the crate and enter it at the appropriate times. While inside its crate, the dog will be quiet. These are all indications of a comfortable, pleasant association with the crate. Of course, the peace of mind the owner enjoys in knowing that the dog is quiet, comfortable, and safe and not destroying the house is immeasurable.

DOESN'T YOUR DOG DESERVE HIS/HER OWN CRATE??!!