



The Dog Crate

WHAT is a dog crate?

A dog crate is a rectangular enclosure with a top and a door, made in a variety of sizes, proportioned to fit any size of dog. Constructed of wire or molded plastic, its purpose is to provide a safe haven, “bedroom” or den for your dog to call his or her own. Crating will also provide security, safety, house training assistance, travel assistance and a cozy bed for nighttime. In the wild dogs choose to live in packs and use self-made dens for housing. If your dog could talk, it would tell you that it has a natural instinct to “den” inherited from its ancestor, the wolf. A dog with a den is much happier, has fewer behavior issues, and is more confident with the control that a structured environment provides. Dogs would much rather be prevented from causing trouble, than be punished for it later.

How not to use a Crate!

Crating is a temporary tool used for puppies to housetrain and to prevent destructive behavior. The goal is to gradually reduce the puppies’ need for the crate until it can be safely left alone. In the case of the adult dog with a behavior problem, the goal is also to gradually reduce your need for the crate. Again, using it only as a tool to prevent the problem while in training is the proper use for a crate.

It is not recommended for a dog regularly left alone all day and the maximum amount of time any adult dog should spend in a crate safely is about 6 hours. If crated for 6 hours the dog must be well exercised both, before and after crating, given lots of personal attention, and not crated at night. It is also most important that the crate be large enough to permit him or her to comfortably stretch out on its side and have ample freedom of movement.

Are Timeouts OK?

Yes, timeouts are fine, but only if done properly! If your puppy gets TOO crazy and cannot focus on anything but play, it is fine to use the crate as a timeout. Since the crate is their safe spot to relax, that is exactly what it will do. The reason time outs work is because dogs have learned to associate crate time with relaxation and sleep. ONLY keep them in the crate for a limited time (3-5 minutes). Anything past 5 minutes will be pointless and can become punishment. They will not remember why they are in there! Remember, we want to keep their crate a positive space. Timeouts are simply just to relax them not punish them.

What size crate should I get?

A crate should always be large enough to permit any size dog to stretch out flat on its side without being cramped and to sit up without hitting its head on the top. While the adult size of a purebred puppy is easy to predict, you will have to estimate that of a mixed breed based on general breed/body type and puppy size at a given age. It is always better to use a crate a little too large than one a little too small.

For a fully-grown adult dog, measure the distance from tip of nose to base (not tip) of tail and use a crate close to, but not less than, this length. The height and width of most crates are properly proportioned to the length, including the convenient “slant-front” models designed to fit station wagons and hatchbacks.

For a puppy, measure as above, than add about 12” for anticipated rapid growth. Reduce the extra space of a too large crate with a reversed carton or a moveable/removable partition made of wire, wood or a rolled up blanket. Remember that a crate too large for a young puppy (the puppy

can walk back and forth from front to back.) defeats its purpose of providing security and promoting bowel control, so its space should always be limited in the beginning.

Where should I put the crate?

When using a crate to confine a dog during training, it is important to avoid making him feel isolated or banished. Place the crate in a place where the dog can see you but make sure it is away from a high traffic area, we do not want the dog to feel the need to protect his territory! Keeping it in a calm, quiet place in the house will help avoid any territorial issues in the future. Also be sure to select a spot free from drafts and not too near a direct heat source.

Make it very clear to children that the crate is NOT a playhouse for them, but a “special room” for the puppy, whose rights should be recognized and respected. However, you should accustom the puppy from the start to letting you reach into the crate at any time.

How long can my puppy be in the crate?

Puppies cannot be expected to “hold it” for an entire workday. A good rule of thumb to assist you is to remember your puppies’ age (in months) and associate that with the number of hours your pup can “hold it.” 3 months of age = 3 hours. Be sure to avoid long good byes and excited play just before you leave. Toss in a treat and a toy, shut the door and leave.

How do I get started?

Leave the door open and place a blanket and a toy inside. Encourage the dog to investigate by luring him inside. Toss treats such as cheese or hotdogs into the far end. Be sure to praise enthusiastically. You can even try feeding meals in the crate.

Continue this pattern for several days, while you are home. Encouraging your dog to enter the crate shut the door for a few minutes at a time (while people are visible or audible nearby. If your dog remains quiet, reward him / her by letting them out of the crate. If the dog is barking or whining, IGNORE. Do not EVER let him/her out for whining! However, the minute the dog is quiet, that’s when you can let it out. The dog will learn very quickly that barking gets them no where, but quiet gets them attention!

Try leaving for 5 minutes and come back in. Do not go to the crate or pay attention to your dog, simply wait for them to be relaxed and then (after 2 minutes) let them out. After a few days, you can extend the time and gradually get your dog used to being alone longer.

How do I crate my pup at night?

Keep in mind that your first night with your puppy may be a sleepless one. But it is necessary to ignore the dog when barking! If you do not, you will only be making it worse on yourself! Make sure your dog has gone outside before putting him in the crate this will ensure that he is not whining because he needs to eliminate! It’s also a good idea to restrict water intake for about an hour before bed. Remember that your dog’s metabolism slows down by quite a bit when lying down, so he will not have to eliminate as much during the night. However, the first couple nights you should be taking him/her out a few times depending on their age. Remember to ONLY let the puppy out when it is calm. If he starts getting overly excited or whining when he sees you, simply turn your back until he stops. We recommend to clients to use the nearest corner: When the dog barks hide behind the corner, the second he is quiet pop back into sight.