

From The Trainer

Crate Training

Patience... Patience... Patience...

It's worth it!

Many people view crate training as cruel. Most dogs, however, see their crate as their own private "den" – an answer to their powerful canine instinct to seek privacy, comfort and security.

THERE ARE A NUMBER OF BENEFITS TO USING A CRATE, ESPECIALLY DURING YOUR DOG'S FIRST YEAR.

1. Destructive behaviour and chewing on items other than his own toys is a dog's way of investigating his surroundings. Safe in his crate, your dog simply cannot indulge in "investigations" that may lead to damage. You're also keeping him from potential harm...electrical outlets, for example.
2. Most dogs will not defecate or urinate in their sleeping areas. Unless the dog is left alone in his crate for unusually long periods of time, or if he's ill, your dog will try very hard to wait until you release him from his "den" before eliminating.
3. A crate-trained dog will be happier and more able to adjust when boarded or placed in a cage while visiting the vet.
4. Traveling with a crate-trained dog will be a lot easier. He'll be comfortable, calm, and will likely never need to be tranquilized before a journey.

BEFORE YOU START, SOME IMPORTANT TIPS:

One of the most crucial things to remember when training your dog for the crate, is that this should always be his "special" place.

NEVER use the crate as a form of punishment or banishment. NEVER force him in or reach in and pull him out...always allow him to enter and leave on his own. NEVER allow anyone to tease or bother him while he's in his "den". And NEVER forget that he needs regular exercise, so limit the amount of time that he spends in his crate.

WHEN PURCHASING A CRATE CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

SIZE: When you are shopping for a crate, it's advisable to buy just one, which will serve your dog for his lifetime. Even though your dog may be small now, the crate should be able to accommodate him at his full adult size. Calculate the size you expect him to stand up and turn around comfortably.

MATERIAL: I suggest you look for heavy-duty plastic. It will clean easily and can be used for journeys by car or airline travel. I would also suggest a model that can be "halved" (top separates from the bottom). This makes for easier cleaning, storing, and

the bottom half may be used alone as a bed, should you decide not to use the crate in the future.

READY TO GIVE IT A TRY?

The best time to begin is to have the crate set up and waiting for the arrival of your new dog or puppy.

Line the crate with a blanket, and consider adding an item of clothing like an old shirt that has your “scent” (it should be lightly worn, but not washed so that the scent remains intact). Having something that smells of you helps enhance the dog’s sense of security and belonging. For a new puppy, I would suggest you place the blanket and shirt in a cardboard box. Place the box in the back of the crate. This will serve as a snug, puppy-size bed. You’ll find that your puppy will naturally gravitate towards the safety and security of the box-bed. Be sure to cut the sides of the box down enough so the puppy doesn’t stumble when getting in or out.

HOW TO START:

Introduce your dog to the crate in a pleasurable way. Place a small treat (easily digestible only!) and some safe toys inside the crate. Continue praising your dog warmly.

Never force the dog to enter or leave, as this may cause fear, anxiety or resistance. He may also show distrust for you if you try to pressure him into the crate with undue aggressiveness.

Allow the dog to set his own timing when entering or remaining in the crate during the introduction period. Patience and diligence are your best tools for success.

Once the dog is entering and remaining in the crate by himself, you can begin to breathe easier! This should be accomplished within a few days or weeks. Have patience!

Next step: place the pup (or ENCOURAGE the older dog) into the crate. Use a treat if necessary, accomplished by quiet praise. Gently but firmly close the door. Give the short command such as “Good Boy. Bed”. The dog may whine for a short time, which is normal. It’s his way of saying he doesn’t like being separated from you.

If the dog cries briefly, but then becomes quiet, you’re in luck. Wait for 10 minutes, then release him. Do not excite him with lavish praise, or being patting him immediately after releasing him. You don’t want to give the dog the impression that the crate is a good place to be released from!

Continue this practice of 10 minute intervals for one or two days, then start graduating to 30 – 40 minutes using the same positive routine for entering (calmly!) and releasing (calmly!). If he appears comfortable and secure, continue 30 – 40 minute intervals for a few days then gradually increase the crate-time as the dog settles into the routine.

Do not leave a puppy in the crate for long periods of time. Keep in mind that he will not have full control over his bladder, and you will need to continue his house-training lessons. Be sure to let a puppy out of the crate to relieve himself in whatever location and manner you've decided on. Experts suggest that puppies be left in their crate according to their age. For each month of age, allow one hour "plus one". (i.e. a 3 month old may be left for up to 84 hours.)

Always keep his favourite and safe toys in the crate with him for his chewing and playing pleasure. A long-lasting "Nyla-bone" is a good choice, or a "Kong" which can be filled with a favourite treat. Most experts agree however that unattended dogs not chew rawhide, beef hide, cow hooves and the like. Anything that is healthy and safe will always be the best choice.

Be sure to clean the crate once or twice a month to keep your dog and your home odour-free and clean. A mild soap solution should be all that is required.

IN SUMMARY:

If, after reading this, you still view crate training as "cruel", consider how cruel it would be to allow your dog to chew his way through an electrical appliance or have a piece of furniture topple over on him as he's romping through your house unattended. Crate training not only keeps your belongings safe, it will keep your canine companion safe.

A final word: PATIENCE! Your puppy or older dog will set his own timing when accepting the crate as his new "den". (An older dog may require more time to adjust.) Forcing the dog in, or using it as punishment will only work against you.

If you have any questions, please contact your veterinarian or a qualified trainer.

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