

Despite what you may think, dog crates have been used successfully by novice dog owners and professional trainers for many years. Crating your dog can be one of the safest and most helpful things you can do to make your new friend comfortable and secure in his/her new home. A crate does for a dog what a den does for a wolf: it provides seclusion, safety and protection. The following tips are helpful for puppies, adolescent and adult dogs.

CHOOSE THE CORRECT SIZE CRATE:

The right-sized crate can be an excellent tool to help with housebreaking. Since dogs don't eliminate where they sleep, the crate should be large enough only for your pup/dog to stand in, turn around in and lay down in. If they can soil one end of the crate and sleep on the other side, the crate is too big. If your pup will grow up to be a large dog, you can block off part of it. A cookie sheet works well in small crates. Many crates come with inserts to facilitate housebreaking as your puppy grows. Make sure that your dog has relieved himself before placing him in the crate.

MAKE THE CRATE COMFORTABLE AND SAFE:

Keep the crate in a semi-private spot, preferably in a bedroom. Dogs are pack animals, and prefer to sleep with their pack, even if they are confined. A young puppy will feel much more secure if he/she sleeps in a room with the human family and is less likely to cry and whine. Provide soft, washable bedding, such as a towel or bath mat and leave a safe chew toy in there as well. If you are housebreaking your dog, do not place food or water in the crate. Never leave any choker chains or prong collars on the dog while unsupervised, especially in the crate.

MAKE SURE YOU HAVE A POSITIVE ATTITUDE:

The crate is a safe place for your dog and should only be used for positive things. Under no circumstances should your dog be left isolated in the crate for long periods of time, nor should the crate be used as punishment. Never yell at your dog while he/she is in the crate, and do not strike the crate to punish the dog. If you have a positive attitude, the crate can become a 'time-out' or 'sleepy time' place that your dog will learn to use correctly.

ESTABLISH A ROUTINE EARLY:

Use the crate for nap time and quiet time even when you are home. This way your dog will not associate the crate with your absence. This is a safe, humane way of keeping your dog out of mischief when you cannot supervise (when you are in the shower, preparing a meal, or working at your computer, etc). This will prevent your dog from getting into trouble and harming himself.

TEACH YOUR DOG TO BE QUIET:

Use a treat or a toy to entice your dog into the crate, then close the door gently and tell him what a good dog he is. If your puppy or dog is small enough, you may gently guide him into the crate. If he remains quiet for a few minutes, come back and reward him by opening the crate and letting him out. Make a special effort to ignore any crying, barking or whining....if you let him out when he whines, he will learn to make noise to get out. If you yell at him to "Shut-up", he may bark even louder because you are 'answering' him. When he stops crying or barking, tell him what a good dog he is and let him out. This way he will learn that his freedom is associated with being quiet. Occasionally feed your dog a special treat while in the crate, or give a special safe toy as a reward for good crate behavior. Gradually increase the amount of time the dog is in the crate until you reach your goal.

BE PATIENT:

As with all other puppy training, this requires patience, consistency and a sense of humor. Your relationship with your pet will be enhanced if you keep his/her life structured. Long after your pup is all grown-up, he may choose to continue to use the crate as a safe, comfortable place he can call his own.

