

CRATE TRAINING YOUR PUPPY

Crate training your puppy can be useful in a variety of situations. If you have a young puppy, you can use the crate to limit his access to the house until he learns all the house rules, such as what he can and can't chew and where he can and can't eliminate. If you properly train your pup to use the crate, he will think of it as his safe place and will be happy to spend time there when needed – the crate should be a safe haven and never a place of punishment.

Selecting A Crate

A wire crate with a divider will be the best option for a puppy. This will allow you to increase the size of the crate as the puppy grows. The space allotted in the crate should be large enough for him to stand up, turn around, and lie down comfortably. You can cover the crate with a crate cover, blanket or sheet to make it cozy.

The Crate Training Process

Crate training can take days or weeks, depending on your dog's age, temperament and past experiences. It's important to keep two things in mind while crate training:

1. The crate should always be associated with something pleasant.
2. Training should take place in a series of small steps – don't expect a new puppy to spend long durations of day time in the crate from the beginning.

Introducing Your Dog To The Crate

Put the crate in a common area of your house where the family spends a lot of time. Somewhere near a back door can be helpful since you'll be taking your puppy out a lot for potty breaks.

You can put a thin mat or towel in the bottom of the crate, or you can leave it empty. Bring your dog over to the crate using a happy tone, with a toy or treats in-hand.

To encourage your dog to enter the crate, drop small food treats near it, then just inside the door, and finally, all the way inside the crate. If your dog is more interested in toys, you can substitute a favorite toy instead of treats. If he refuses to go all the way in at first, that's okay – don't force him to enter. Continue tossing treats into the crate until your dog will walk calmly all the way into the crate to get the food. If he isn't interested in treats, try tossing a favorite toy in the crate.

Feeding Your Dog Meals In The Crate

Immediately begin feeding your dog his regular meals in the crate. This is an easy way to make the crate positive. If your dog will readily enter the crate, put the food dish all the way at the back of the crate. If your dog is reluctant to enter the crate, put the dish only as far inside as he will readily go without becoming fearful or anxious. Each time you feed him, place the dish a little further back in the crate. Leave the crate door open during this time so your dog can exit the crate as desired.

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Conditioning Your Dog To The Crate For Longer Time Periods

After your dog is eating his regular meals in the crate with no sign of fear or anxiety, you can confine him there for short time periods while you are home or away. Encourage him by pointing to the inside of the crate with a long lasting and safe chew item in your hand. After your dog enters the crate, praise him, give him the lasting chew item and close the door. The safest lasting chew item for an unsupervised puppy is a KONG stuffed with frozen peanut butter, pumpkin, plain yogurt, or canned dog food (for examples). Leave him in the kennel for anywhere from 5-30 minutes – or longer if you are leaving the house. When you let your dog out of the crate, pick up and put away the lasting chew item until the next time he is crated.

Crating Your Dog At Night

Put your dog in the crate using a small, quickly edible treat. Initially, it may be a good idea to put the crate near the back door, especially if you have a puppy. Puppies under 3 months of age often need to go outside to eliminate during the night, and you'll want to be able to hear your puppy when he whines to be let outside. You may need to sleep on a couch or air mattress nearby for the first few nights to make sure your puppy does not get too anxious. If the crate is initially in your room, once your dog is sleeping comfortably through the night in his crate, you can begin to gradually move it to the location you prefer. Healthy puppies should have their access to water removed at least two hours before bedtime to help decrease the frequency of potty trips they need to make during the night.

Crating Your Dog When Left Alone

You should leave your puppy crated when you leave the house for short periods of time during the day. Put him in the crate using a tasty and lasting chew item, like a frozen, stuffed KONG.

Don't make your departures emotional and prolonged, but matter-of-fact. Praise your dog briefly, give him a treat/chew item for entering the crate and then leave quietly. When you return home, don't reward your dog for excited behavior by responding to him in an excited, enthusiastic way. Keep arrivals low key and take him straight out to eliminate. Continue to crate your dog for short periods from time to time when you're home and overnight so he doesn't associate crating only with being left alone.

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Potential Problems

Too Much TIME in the Crate

A crate isn't a magical solution. If used incorrectly, a dog can feel trapped and frustrated. For example, if your dog is crated all day while you're at work and then crated again all night, he's spending too much time in too small a space. Other arrangements should be made to accommodate his physical and emotional needs. Puppies under 6 months of age shouldn't stay in a crate for more than 3-4 hours at a time during the day.

Whining

If your dog whines or cries while in the crate at night, it may be difficult to decide whether he's whining to be let out of the crate, or whether he needs to be let outside to eliminate. If it has been several hours and you think the puppy needs a potty break, take him out on leash to his potty zone. This should be a trip with a purpose, not play time. If you're convinced that your pup doesn't need to eliminate (perhaps because he just recently went potty), the best response is to ignore him until he stops whining. Do not let him out, otherwise you'll teach your dog that whining gets him attention outside of the crate and the whining behavior will persist.

If you've progressed gradually through the training steps and haven't done too much too fast, you will be less likely to encounter excessive vocalization in the crate. As a puppy learns to sleep overnight in the crate, you may want to move the crate to an area of the house where your movement does not accidentally wake the puppy in the middle of the night, and where their movement does not wake you! A common area of the house on the main floor is a great option.