

Crate Training

While using a crate may not be necessary or right for every dog, for many dogs a crate can be a helpful training and management tool! But, just like any tool, proper use is the key to success.

Why crate your dog? For puppies and untrained adults (those who are not yet house-trained or may have a tendency to chew or get into other mischief), a crate is an absolutely essential tool! Not only does the crate help to build a dog's bladder and bowel control (by using the dog's natural motivation to avoid eliminating in an area where s/he also has to lay down), it also limits the dog's ability to get into trouble when unsupervised. The crate can also be used for the management of a variety of different behaviors, such as over-excited behavior when greeting visitors. Many dogs actually enjoy having a private, safe space to consider their own and a crate can provide this sanctuary. Crating in the car is also the safest choice for traveling!



What size should you use? Make sure the crate you select is large enough so that your dog can stand comfortably without being cramped lengthwise or by height. Your dog should be able to lie down, stand, and turn around comfortably inside the crate. For dogs that are still developing bladder and bowel control, too large of a crate can be problematic as the dog can eliminate in one area of the crate and lay down in the remaining clean space. If you are choosing a crate for a puppy, a divider can be a useful way to avoid this issue. Simply use the divider to limit the dog's space in the crate until the dog grows into her crate!

How do you use a crate? It is important to take the proper steps to introduce your dog to his or her new crate. By following the steps below, most dogs and puppies will come to accept, and even enjoy, time spent inside their crate.

Step 1: Make sure the crate is comfortable. Place a blanket or pad on the floor of the crate to create a soft place for your dog to lie. For wire crates, place a lightweight sheet or blanket over the crate (leaving the door exposed) to create a more enclosed feel for your dog.

Step 2: Begin training with the crate door open. Toss treats inside the crate to encourage your dog to enter, but never force him/her. For any dog that seems hesitant to enter the crate, place treats close to the entrance of the crate and just inside the door to entice your dog to enter. Any time that your dog enters the crate (even if s/he exits the crate immediately), s/he should get plenty of praise and treats. For dogs that enter and remain inside the crate for any length of time, continue to treat and praise for the entire duration of time spent inside the crate.

Step 3: Close the door. Once your dog readily and happily enters the crate, work to acclimate the dog to being closed into the crate. Allow the dog to enter the crate and close the door, but do not latch it. Immediately praise and treat your dog and then open the door to the crate, allowing the dog to leave if s/he wishes. Continue this exercise, slowly increasing the length of time that the door is held closed. Reward your dog for calm behavior.

Step 4: Try some distance. Once your dog can remain inside the crate calmly for at least 20 seconds with the door held shut, you can begin latching the crate door and moving away. Start by having your dog enter the crate as before, shut the door and latch it and take one step away from the crate. Treat and praise your dog for calm behavior and then open the door to allow the dog to leave the crate if s/he wishes. Continue this exercise, slowly increasing both your distance from the crate and the length of time that the dog remains calmly in the crate with the door shut.

Crate Training (Continued)

Protips for crate training:

- Make sure your dog is well exercised and has had a chance to go to the bathroom before crating.
- Leave the crate door open when not in use and randomly hide surprises or toss treats inside. Make it fun!
- Feed your dog meals inside the crate to build a positive association.
- When leaving your dog in the crate, remove his collar or harness (to avoid potential hang ups) and give him a Kong or food puzzle full of yummy treats or frozen peanut butter to keep busy.
- If your dog is whining, barking or otherwise fussing from inside the crate, remember to wait until he is calm before letting him out. Otherwise your dog may begin to learn that barking or whining will result in being released from the crate (the exception to this would be a dog who is panicked enough to cause injury to himself; see above section).

When is crating *not* appropriate? Dogs that are fully trained and well-behaved in the house may not need a crate at this point in their lives. Still, even some well-acclimated, established dogs may enjoy having a crate available to them. The length of time your dog spends in the crate is also important to consider and a dog should never be crated for longer than would be appropriate for their age and health. A young puppy's ability to hold his bladder or bowels will vary depending on age and, even for mature dogs, urinary tract infections and other medical issues can influence their ability to "hold it". Dogs with separation issues or anxiety about confinement should not be crated without the careful guidance and oversight of a dog training professional. Crating a dog improperly can be harmful, both physically and mentally. If your dog is showing major distress when crated (drooling, going to the bathroom in the crate, causing self-injury), discontinue use of the crate and consult a professional trainer.

Additional resources for crate training:

Check out more tips for crate training from [Fear Free Happy Homes!](#)

Video: [How to Crate Train an Older Dog in 7 Simple Steps](#)

