

Crate Training

Crate training makes it easier to supervise your dog and prevents her from having complete access to the house where she could get into mischief. It also helps with housetraining, because dogs have a natural tendency not to soil their den or sleeping area. Follow these tips to make the crate a positive place your dog is happy to use for the rest of her life.

What to know before starting crate training

Crate training doesn't happen overnight and introducing your dog to a crate should take place over a long period of time (several weeks or more). Young dogs can only be expected to control their bladder and bowels for a few hours, not an entire work day or overnight.

While you are introducing your dog to her crate, use another space to safely house her for extended periods of time when you are unavailable, such as during the work day or at night. Create a dog-safe environment like a small bathroom, kitchen, gated-off area of a room, or an ex-pen (a small, freestanding pen) containing the dog's crate (with door removed), water, toys, and potty area. The potty area can consist of newspaper, pee pads or even a square of sod in a cat litter box. This allows your dog to sleep in her crate but potty on an approved, easy-to-clean surface.

Use this space to house your dog anytime you leave your dog for longer than she can hold her bowels and bladder. Use your puppy's age in months plus one to determine the number of hours he can be crated.

How long does crate training take?

Crate training can be accomplished in several days, or may take several weeks depending on your dog's age, temperament, and previous experiences.

How do I crate train my dog?

Step 1: Introduce your dog to the crate

Put the crate in an area of your house where you spend a lot of time, such as the family room or kitchen. Put a soft sleeping blanket or towel in the crate. Bring your dog over to the crate and talk to her in an excited, happy tone of voice. Make sure the door to the crate is securely fastened open so it won't accidentally hit your dog and frighten him.

Drop some treats around the crate, just inside the door, and then gradually all the way inside to encourage your dog to enter. If she doesn't go all the way in at first to get the food, that's fine. Don't force her to enter.

Repeat this experience until your dog will calmly walk into the crate to get a treat. If your dog isn't interested in food, try tossing a favorite toy in the crate instead. This process may take just a few minutes, or as long as several days.

Step 2: Feed your dog in the crate

After your dog has been introduced to the crate, you can start feeding her regular meals near the crate for a while. This will create pleasant associations with the crate and decrease any fear she has of the crate. Each time you feed her, place the dish a little more toward the back of the crate. Once your dog is comfortably eating her food while standing in the crate, you can close the door while she's eating.

At first, open the door as soon as she finishes her meal, let her out, and praise her. Slowly increase the amount of time she spends in the crate after finishing her meal up to 10 minutes. If she begins to whine to be let out, you may have increased the duration of crating too quickly. Next time, try leaving her for a shorter time. Be sure to

release her from the crate when she is not whining or barking. If vocalizing results in being let out of the crate, she's more likely to do it again (and for longer and louder) next time!

Step 3: Extend time in the crate

After your dog is eating her regular meals in the crate with no sign of fear or anxiety, you can begin to confine her there for short periods while you are home. Give her a command to enter such as "kennel up." You can encourage her to do so by pointing to the inside of the crate with a tidbit of a favorite food in your hand.

After your dog enters the crate, reward her with a treat and close the door. Sit quietly near the crate for 5-10 minutes and then go out of sight into another room for a few minutes. When you return, sit quietly again for a short time, and then release your dog. Repeat this procedure several times a day. With each repetition, gradually increase the length of time the dog is crated, and the length of time you are out of sight. Once your dog will quietly remain in the crate for about 30 minutes, you can begin leaving her crated when you are gone for short periods, and/or letting her sleep there at night but remember to still let her outside periodically to create good housetraining habits until she is able to "hold it" for extended periods of time.

How do I manage whining?

If your dog whines or cries while in the crate at night, it may be difficult to decide whether she is whining to be let out of the crate, or if she needs to be let outside to eliminate. Initially you can ignore the whining. Your dog may stop if she is just testing to see if she'll be let out. If the whining continues after you have ignored it for several minutes, you can repeat the phrase your dog has associated with going outside to eliminate. If she responds and becomes excited, take her outside. This should be a trip with a purpose, not play time.

If you are convinced that your dog does not need to eliminate, the best response is to ignore the whining completely. Most attempts at punishing the behavior actually end up inadvertently reinforcing it because the dog is getting attention from you. During the process of ignoring whining, expect it to get worse before it gets better. If the problem becomes unmanageable, you may need to restart the crate training process from the very beginning.

What to avoid when crate training

- Don't yell at her or pound on the crate if she is whining, because this will likely make it worse.
- Don't give in when the whining or behavior gets worse! Your dog is throwing a temper tantrum which you don't want to reinforce by giving her what she wants.
- Don't use the crate as a punishment for bad behavior. Again, you want to associate the crate with only good things so your dog is happy to use the crate.