

What is Crate Training?



Crate training a dog just means teaching the dog that a crate is a safe and wonderful place to be.

What is a dog crate?

A dog crate is a rectangular enclosure that has a top, a floor, 3 sides and a door that latches. Common crate types are made of heavy wire or heavy molded plastic; the latter are often referred to as “Vari-Kennel crates,” “clamshell crates,” or “airline crates,” since they look something like clamshells and they are the only type of crate acceptable for canine air travel. Wire crates usually have a removable molded plastic, epoxy covered floor pan. Both types of crate are available in various sizes and finishes.

Who uses crates?

Anyone who regularly handles dogs trusts and uses crates. Such people include breeders, groomers, trainers, veterinarians, dog show exhibitors and obedience field trial competitors. People who get a new dog of any age should seriously consider getting a crate at the same time.

Where can I purchase a crate?

Most pet supply stores sell crates, but you can probably purchase one more cheaply online either from www.ebay.com or from KV Vet Supply at www.kvvet.com. Other companies that sell them are Doctors Foster&Smith, and J.B. Wholesale. RAG loans crates to foster families.

What kind of crate should I buy?

Many people prefer the wire type crates for everyday use, for ease of portability and because they can see their dog in them more easily. If you ever transport your dog in an airplane though, you will have to use a Vari-Kennel type crate. You may also want to purchase a crate dolly for use in moving the crate with your dog in it. All wire crates are collapsible; the more expensive ones fold up and have carry handles. Dogs sometimes prefer the Vari-Kennel crates, because they like the feeling of being in a den. However, you can create a similar effect with a wire crate by draping a blanket over the top and 3 sides of the crate.

What size crate should I buy?

Even if you have a puppy, you should purchase a crate that will be comfortable for your dog when the dog is full grown. The dog should be able to stand up without having to bend its head down and lie down without curling its legs into its chest. For Golden Retrievers, you should get a wire crate that is at least 26”W x 42”L x 28”H. A larger model would be even better. If you want to get a Vari-Kennel instead, purchase an XL: 27”W x 40”L x 30” H. If you have a puppy to put in a wire crate for training purposes, you can block off the back half or 2/3 of the crate with a piece of corrugated cardboard or purchase a crate divider. As the puppy grows, you can then move the barrier backward to enlarge the usable space.

Why should I crate My dog?

Housebreaking

Crate training is one of the most efficient and effective ways to house train a dog, no matter how old the dog is. Of course, most often it is the puppies that need to be housebroken, but some adult Rescue dogs have been kept outside their entire lives need to be house trained. If they are given adequate opportunity to eliminate elsewhere, dogs will not soil where they rest or sleep. Temporarily confining your dog to a small area strongly inhibits the tendency to urinate and defecate.

Providing a refuge

Domestic dogs have an instinctual behavior to den, just as their wild ancestors had. They enjoy having a snug, secure place in which to curl up. In a house, many dogs will preferentially choose to nap under a desk or table or in the corner of a room. A crate provides an ideal “den” for a dog. Once a dog is crate trained, he may choose to spend time in his crate even if you never close the crate door. Sometimes a dog will go into the crate just to “get away from it all” when it’s had enough of the household commotion. The dog’s crate should be his space and should not be used for anything else, by anyone else. If you have young children, do not allow them to play in the dog’s crate. You expect your dog to respect your belongings; you must respect the dog’s.

Providing safety for your dog and your house

If you have crate trained your dog, you will always be able to leave your house for a few hours and not be concerned for your dog’s safety. Also, you will not have to worry about him damaging anything that belongs to you, either out of spite at having been left behind or because of separation anxiety. If given free rein of the house, a puppy (a Golden may exhibit “puppy behavior” until it is 3 years old or more) may try to chew on electrical cords, on plants that may be poisonous, on shoes or clothing, or even on your wood or leather furniture. Even adult dogs, if left along for several hours, may get into mischief just because they are bored.

Traveling safely

If you confine your dog of a crate in your vehicle, you won’t be distracted by having a dog running around in the back of the car, jumping over the seats or trying to climb in your lap. If you have to hit your brakes suddenly, the dog will not be thrown around the car and possibly injured. If you will be staying in a motel with your dog, you may be required to crate the dog while in the room. If the dog must travel in an airplane, he must be crated in a Vari-Kennel style crate.

Reducing the likelihood of having to give up your dog

If you allow behavior problems to develop or persist, you are far more likely to want to give up your dog than if you have a dog whose behavior is under control. The use of a crate can help you manage behavior issues effectively by eliminating opportunities for misbehavior. You want your dog to be part of your family and to show appropriate behavior. Your dog wants to please you. A crate can help you develop the bond and relationship you both desire.

How to crate train

- Always remove you dog’s collar before confining him in the crate to prevent possible entanglement.
- Be sure your dog has had the opportunity to go outside to relieve himself before trying to introduce him to the crate. Also, it is especially important to allow him to “go out” before leaving him in a crate for an extended period of time.

- When possible, place the crate near or next to where you spend a lot of time when you are at home. Leave the crate door open and encourage the dog to go inside the crate. Toss a favorite toy or even a small treat into the crate – this will create a positive association with the crate. Use a phrase like “Kennel up!” when the dog enters the crate, then praise him.
- Do not try to push, pull, or force the dog into the crate. Once the dog gets used to being in the crate when you are nearby, start leaving him in there for a minute or two while you step out of sight.
- Gradually increase the time you are away. Getting the dog used to your absence from the room in which he is crated prevents an association being made with the crate and your leaving him alone when you leave the house.
- Establish a routine of having the dog use the crate for nap times and whenever he needs to be left alone. Do not praise the dog immediately after releasing him – this can reinforce the desirability of leaving the crate. Take the dog directly from the crate to your chosen outside “potty” spot, praise his performance and go directly inside.
- Do not crate the dog when the weather is warm, unless you place the crate in an air-conditioned room.
- NEVER use the crate as a form of punishment or reprimand. If you do, the dog will learn to fear and resent the crate.

Troubleshooting

If your dog soils the crate,

- he may be too young to have much control if he is less than 4 months old
- you may not have allowed the dog to eliminate or to get enough exercise prior to being confined
- you may be feeding the dog too poor or too rich a food; or too large a meal
- the dog may have drunk large amounts of water prior to being crated
- the dog may be experiencing severe separation anxiety when left alone

The cost of not using a crate

- table legs or cabinet bottoms
- chairs and sofas
- throw rugs or carpet
- houseplants and a possible trip to the vet because the dog ate a poisonous plant
- chewed electric, telephone or computer wires and possible having a dead dog, as well
- your dog’s safety and your peace of mind

Use a crate, don’t abuse a crate

- the dog may have worms, gaseous or loose stools, colitis, a bladder infection, a prostate problem or another health condition
- If your dog messes in the crate while you are out, do not punish him upon return. Just wash out the crate and use a pet odor neutralizer such as Nature’s Miracle.

Misconceptions

"It's like living in jail."

"It's cruel to put a dog in a crate."

"My dog will hate being cooped up in a crate!"

"Being in a crate will drive the dog nuts!"

"Staying in the crate will make him hyper and destructive."

"He'll just pee in there instead of on the floor, and then he'll get the urinating all over himself."

"You can't crate train an adult dog."

"I would only use a crate to confine a dog that has misbehaved."

"I don't think my dog will like the crate, but it'll be a fun place in which my kids can play."

Reality

"Our dog loves his crate, even though he's now completely reliable in the house."

"The crate saved my sanity -and my furniture!"

"Thanks to the crate, our puppy is always a pleasure and never a problem."

"I'll never raise another dog without a crate."

"It's the best way to housebreak a dog."

"A crate provides the dog with a place all his own."

"Would you raise a child without a playpen or crib to sleep in?"

"I can leave home for several hours and not worry about the house or the dog."

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