

# Crate Training

(Providing your puppy with a life-long secure retreat)

The best favor you can do for your Puppy is to buy him a 'crate' that he can hang out in. There are basically two kinds of crates. An 'airline crate' is made of hard plastic and has metal bar air vents on the sides and a metal-bar door. It is called an airline crate because it is what you would use to take your dog on an airplane trip. The most common brand is called a Vari-Kennel. You can also buy a 'wire crate' that is made solely of metal bars. It has been our experience that Puppies like the sense of warmth and privacy afforded by the Vari-Kennel. Vari-Kennels can be bought at most pet supply stores, from vendors at dog shows, and from mail order houses that specialize in pet supplies. They come in several sizes, designated as 200, 300, 400 and 500. Buy a size that will fit your adult Dog comfortably. There is an even larger Vari-Kennel (700), which might be appropriate for a large Great Dane or perhaps a Shetland Pony, but there are good reasons not to provide your Dog with one of these King-Kong-Krates. For one thing, you will eventually want to take your puppy on a trip and it is really convenient if his crate can go too. The problem is that it is difficult to get the Shetland-pony-size Vari-Kennel into most vehicles, so you lose out on one of the really neat features of crate training. Also, remember that the crate is a place for your Puppy to curl up for a nap, not a place to play fetch.

The crate should be equipped with a 'crate mat' - something soft and comfy for your puppy to curl up on. Most pet supply stores sell various kinds of crate mats made to fit Vari-Kennels and other crates of various sizes. We recommend against mats that are covered foam rubber. Puppies seem to really love to shred foam rubber and will rip through the toughest cover to get to the heart of the matter. The first thing you know, your nice new \$50 foam-rubber crate mat has been reduced to rubble. (Although this is a diversion, you also want to avoid doggy beds that are filled with polystyrene beads. There is no sight quite so spectacular as a whole house full of these pesky little white beads, each magnetized with static electricity, after your Puppy has ripped up the outer cover.) Actually, you can make a perfectly serviceable crate mat by folding up a couple of old blankets so that they fit the dimensions of the crate.

The crate serves several useful functions. First, if he gets used to sleeping in it from the time he is a little puppy, it will become his warm, comfortable retreat for the rest of his life. When he has grown up, you will occasionally find that he has curled up in his open crate for a nap, or just to get away from the noise and hub-bub of the house. The value of crate training is really apparent on those occasions when you have guests who are uncomfortable with dogs (just put your Dog in his crate for a few hours) and when you travel (your Dog is never away from home, because his home goes everywhere he does).

Some people have an instinctive prejudice against crates, because they equate them with cages and feel that putting a dog in a crate is like putting an animal in a zoo. What you should remember is that a Puppy (especially a young one) is going to sleep quite a bit of the time anyway, so why not have him sleep in a warm and familiar and safe place like his very own crate.

But the really great thing about a crate is that you can use it to potty train your new puppy. Here is how you do it. Dogs have an instinct to not foul their living quarters. So when the puppy wakes up from his nap in his crate and needs to go potty, what do you think he will do? You got it - he will yell to get your attention. What he is telling you is that he wants to get out so that he can go do his stuff. At this point you should take him to wherever it is that you are training him to poop and piddle and stand around with him until he does it. Then you praise him extravagantly and take him back into the house. He can stay out in the room with you as long as you are able to supervise him and keep a close eye on him. As soon as you are not able to give him your undivided attention, put him back in his crate. Since he is probably exhausted from all the playtime he has just had, he will probably curl up for another nap. When he wakes up again, repeat the whole process.

What you are doing is using the crate to confine the little tike so that he doesn't wake up from his nap and take a whiz on your Persian rug while you are on the phone or in the shower, or otherwise distracted. Since he doesn't want to piddle on his own Persian rug (his crate mat), he lets you know when he is ready to do his stuff. Then you get to give him all the right positive reinforcement for doing it where you want him to do it. Voila! In no time at all you have a house-broken puppy.

As your puppy gets the idea that the backyard is the place to do his elimination routine, you will find that he won't have to be confined to his crate at all. In fact, he will soon go the door and tell you in some doggy way that he needs to heed the call of Nature. But you must be vigilant! Learn his body language. Some puppies will whine or scratch at the door. Some will just pace around looking uncomfortable. The point is, if you don't get the message, pretty soon he is going to make his deposit(s) on the floor by the door. Every time you let this happen you have suffered a setback in your house-breaking campaign, because he has learned that 'in the house' is an acceptable place to do his nasty stuff. Therefore, even after he has become pretty trustworthy about where he does his business, it is still a good idea to put your Puppy in his crate when you are going to be too busy to pay attention to him. Whereas he might just make a puddle on the floor by the front door (after all, it is a long way from his bed or his rug by the fireplace), he is really going to yell if he is actually in his bed. And you will hear him and you can excuse yourself from your phone conversation long enough to take him out to do his business.

All-in-all, effective crate training is probably the single most important thing that you can do to assure that you and your Puppy get off to a good start and have a harmonious life together.

One more word on a related topic - barriers. Say you need to confine the little guy to a room or area. Whether you choose an exercise pen or a gate placed in a doorway, don't make it too low. If the puppy is faced with an impossible obstacle, he will not challenge it as much. If he ever makes his escape - well, now he's got the idea that barriers are not insurmountable. He will always look at every gate and fence with the idea of getting over it. I believe this is often how fence-challenging dogs are created. Then you have a lifelong problem with a dog who is an escape artist. Sadly, that life is often a short one as the escapee runs into deadly trouble.