

Crate Training Your Puppy

- Crate training is a method of housebreaking puppies in which a crate (an indoor kennel) is used.
- The crate must be large enough to allow the puppy to lie down and turn around without allowing room to soil outside the bed.
- The crate should never be used as a form of punishment.
- Dogs that associate their crate with positive experiences, such as feeding, may continue to use it by choice for the rest of their lives.

What Is Crate Training?

Many veterinarians recommend crate training as a good way to housebreak puppies, and in some cases, adult dogs. This training method is based on the principle that dogs prefer not to soil where they sleep. A comfortable crate not only provides a puppy with a secure, den-like atmosphere but also prevents destructive behaviors (such as chewing inappropriate items) and protects against household dangers (such as electrical wires) when a puppy isn't being supervised.

What Kind of Crate Is Appropriate?

A wide variety of crates can be purchased from your local pet store. The key is to find a crate that is large enough to allow your puppy to lie down and turn around without allowing room to soil outside the bed.

If your puppy is a large breed, consider purchasing a crate that will have enough room for your dog when he or she is full grown. However, to housebreak your puppy in a large crate, you must decrease the size of the crate's interior with either adjustable panels (which are available for some crates) or materials or objects that cannot be chewed and swallowed by a teething puppy.

How Do I Crate Train My Puppy?

Associate the crate with positive things. Create a soft bed by placing a towel or blanket on the floor of the crate. For the first few days, leave off the top of the crate or keep the door open. Place the crate in

a common area where your puppy can be with you while getting accustomed to the crate. Place treats, kibble, and/or toys inside the crate to entice your puppy to explore it. Whenever your puppy enters the crate, shower him or her with praise. For the first few days, allow your puppy to enter and exit the crate as he or she pleases.

Use the crate to help housebreak your puppy. Feed your puppy in the crate and, when the food is consumed, immediately take your puppy outdoors to urinate and defecate. Eating will stimulate your puppy to urinate and defecate, and your puppy will quickly learn the routine.

The rules of the crate. Puppies should be taken outdoors to eliminate (and duly praised) before being placed in the crate and as soon as they are removed from the crate. To prevent the puppy from associating the crate with negative experiences, the crate should never be used as punishment. If toys are left in the crate, ensure that they are large enough that your puppy can't swallow, or choke on, them and that they can't be chewed into smaller pieces.

Begin with small increments of time in the crate. Young puppies have very little bladder and bowel control, so they can't spend much time in a

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crate. Young puppies should be taken outdoors frequently (such as every 2 hours during the day) and given lots of praise. If you crate your puppy at night, place the crate near your bed so that you can hear your puppy cry, which will usually mean that your puppy has to urinate or defecate. Young puppies usually need to go outdoors at least once or twice in the night for at least a few weeks. Your

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puppy will gradually extend the time between bathroom breaks until he or she can sleep through the night and can wait until early morning to urinate or defecate.

Start your puppy with short increments of time, such as 30 minutes to an hour, in the crate. Over the course of a few weeks, gradually increase the amount of time. Puppies younger than 4 months should spend no more than 4 hours at a time in the crate, except for when sleeping at night. If you need to crate your puppy during a full workday, have someone let your puppy outdoors periodically. Ensure that clean water is always available in the crate.

If your puppy soils the bed, remove the bedding until he or she can be in the crate without soiling. If your puppy continues to soil where he or she sleeps, your puppy may have been raised in poor breeding conditions in which he or she had to sleep in urine or feces. Consult your veterinarian for advice or to see if an underlying medical condition is causing the problem.

Remember to take your puppy outdoors to eliminate as soon as you remove him or her from the crate. Then you can begin to allow your puppy short periods of supervised activity in the house. Start by limiting your puppy to one room where you can observe him or her and interrupt inappropriate elimination with a trip outdoors. If your puppy does well, you can gradually increase your puppy's freedom in the house.

What Are the Benefits of Crate Training?

When done properly, crate training can help a puppy learn to wait to urinate or defecate until he or she is outdoors. A crate helps keep curious puppies from getting into trouble (for example, household dangers and destructive behaviors). When a puppy associates a crate with positive experiences, the puppy will often choose to continue using the crate as a haven as he or she grows into adulthood and throughout life.