



Crate Training 101: Train Your Dog Successfully

The Great Crate Debate: Why Your Dog Absolutely MUST Have A Crate (Part 1)

Michelle King, of Reseda, California, thought Crystal, her 6-month-old Golden Retriever, looked so cute snuggled into the pillows on her son's bed. "She was asleep, so I left her alone and took a shower," Michelle remembers. "When I came back to the bedroom, there was stuffing scattered everywhere. Crystal had chewed up the bedding and even had a piece of fabric hanging from ear to ear.

A friend suggested that Michelle try putting her puppy into a crate when she couldn't keep an eye on her. "I resisted because I didn't want to confine Crystal, and I didn't think that she would cause any more damage. But I was wrong," she says. "When my pup chomped off chunks of mattress one evening soon after, I bought a crate that same day. I wasn't thrilled about using it, but Crystal's crime sprees were becoming too expensive."

At first glance, putting your puppy into the small, confined space of a crate may seem cruel, but it's actually one of the kindest things you can do for your dog. Marcus Thompson, a German Shepherd trainer and breeder

from Vermont, makes the following connection between dogs and their wolf ancestors:

“Wolves and dogs are den animals that feel protected and comfortable when they're sleeping in a covered area. The den provides security and a calming effect,” Marcus says. “Besides the bed or the couch, many dogs naturally choose places to sleep in the house that closely resemble a den or crate, such as beneath a desk or dining table, behind the drapes, or in an alcove.”

Who's The Boss?

Also known as a hard-sided pet carrier, a crate is a great training aid that helps you establish who's in charge. You decide when to put your puppy in the crate and when to take it out, so your puppy learns that you're the leader. This makes learning other skills easier because your puppy knows it can trust you.

As a destruction-proof zone, a crate gives your puppy a safe place to call its own and to stay out of mischief. Young dogs have a boundless supply of energy and are naturally curious. Left unsupervised, it only takes a few

minutes for them to discover the joys (and dangers) of chewing, digging or trashcan raiding.

If you're unable to keep an eye on your puppy, it's better to put it into a crate for an hour or so, than to be angry if your little darling gnaws on an antique chair leg or destroys your best pair of shoes.

The Great Crate Debate: Why Your Dog Absolutely MUST Have A Crate (Part 2)

Aside from giving your pup the opportunity to avoid temptation of trouble and destruction around the house when you are not looking, its crate is also a practical piece of dog furniture to have around the house. It doubles as a dog bed, and makes a good hiding spot for puppies to stash their favorite toys.

Or, if you're having cleaning or repair work done in your home, putting your puppy in a crate ensures you avoid worrying that your pup may get underfoot, become injured, or escape if a worker leaves the door or gate open.

First used by airlines to contain pets while traveling, pet carrier crates are indispensable if you want to take your puppy along while traveling or on vacation. Scott and Diane Joris, from Miami, Florida, don't even think about leaving home without their canine companion, Buddy, and of course – Buddy's crate.

“The minute we put him inside his crate, he just goes to sleep and doesn't wake up until we walk off the plane.” Scott says. “Her small crate fits right on the floor underneath the seat, and it's so easy to take her with me.

Stanley Anderson, a Labrador Retriever breeder from Miami, Florida as well, suggests using a crate for your dog while riding in the car, too. “In the event of an accident, a loose dog in the car becomes a projectile and can be easily injured. It can also escape and either be killed by oncoming traffic or disappear in strange surroundings, never to be found again,” Stanley says.

There are other good reasons to use a crate. At some time during its life, your dog may have to go to the veterinarian and may need to remain in a crate for several hours, or even overnight, while receiving medical treatment.

For some dogs, going to the veterinarian is stressful enough without having to experience sudden confinement. If your puppy is already crate-savvy, it has a better chance of feeling more at home, even during an emergency.

Here is another reason to crate train your puppy: During a natural disaster, such as a fire, earthquake, hurricane, tornado or flood, a crate may be a necessity and the only safe refuge your dog may have.

There have been hundreds of reports of house dogs' behavior during one of these disasters. The ones that were properly crate trained were quick to seek safety in their crates, while the others would aimlessly run around with stress, often getting injured or even killed by falling debris.

And lastly, as you all have heard already, a crate also doubles as a housetraining skill builder. Housetraining a puppy is much easier if you use a crate. Puppies usually won't soil where they sleep, so once you let them out of the crate you'll know it's time to take them outside to eliminate.

The Great Crate Debate: Why Your Dog Absolutely MUST Have A Crate (Part 3)

Going Crate Shopping

Once available in only two styles and one color – wire or molded plastic in basic beige – pet carrier crates nowadays come in a variety of materials and colors, and in several basic types. There are advantages and disadvantages to each model, depending upon how you want to use your crate.

Plastic Carriers, The Most Popular

The plastic models have ventilation on each end and is the only one of the crate types that airlines accept for transporting a dog. It gives the dog the most protection from anything dangerous that may be falling inside, and keeps the dog warm during cold weather.

When you purchase a crate, it usually comes disassembled in three big pieces: a top and bottom section, and a metal door with a locking device. You'll also receive a small plastic bag containing all the screws needed to

put the carrier together. Don't worry – it's easy to do. You don't need any special tools and the sides snap together within minutes.

Plastic crates range in price, depending upon the precise design. Although the doors on most of these models open on one side, some styles have doors you can open on either the right or the left sides, and some have different types of locks. Other crates may have wheels on the bottom for easy transport, or may have sloped sides designed to fit into a car a little easier.

Important Tip: When choosing a plastic crate, look for a model that is labeled “Airline Approved” by the manufacturer because it indicates the strongest, sturdiest design.

Wire Carriers

Resembling cages, wire crates have a metal or plastic pan on the bottom that you can remove for easy cleaning. Although wire carriers are okay for dogs, they may not be the best choice for puppies. The spaces between the wire bars look small, but a puppy of most breeds might get a toe or

foot caught between the bars or in the space between the bottom pan and the bar.

Wire carriers are great to use during the summer because the greater ventilation allows air to flow through to keep your dog cooler. If it's hot and you're using it outdoors while camping or picnicking, be sure to place a shade cloth or sheet across the top to keep your dog nice and cool. You can also purchase an electric clip-on fan to help cool your dog.

Some wire models collapse and fold flat for easy transporting. If you're using a wire crate in your car, find a model that fits your car the best, with doors either on the sides or on the front, or with a square or a slanted top. The top of a wire crate isn't solid, so some dogs may feel a little vulnerable, especially those that are a little insecure. You may want to consider covering it with a sheet or large towel.

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Once you have a crate, begin training your puppy to use it right away. Some puppies are just naturals and pick up the den idea the moment they

see it. Set it down on the floor, open the door and watch the pup toggle right in to check it out. If there's a comfy blanket with some interesting toys inside the crate, a pup may stay a while all on its own.

Other puppies need more coaching. Here is where your patience comes in handy. The best crate training is a slow, positive experience and doesn't happen overnight. It may take a few days, weeks, or even months before your puppy feels completely comfortable in its new digs.

This depends mostly on how determined and confident you feel about having your puppy sleep in a crate. If you're unsure, your puppy will also be skeptical. If you don't give up on the training, your puppy will learn to accept the crate faster.

There Are Two Important Rules Of Crate Training:

1) Don't place your puppy's crate in the garage or in a room where it can't see you. The puppy will feel abandoned, and will bark or howl until you show up again, making it an extremely long night, as well as delaying the crate training process.

During the daytime, put the crate in the room where you spend the most amount of time. Come nighttime, move it into your bedroom. That way your puppy will feel secure that you're nearby. If it whimpers during the night, it probably means potty time. Take your puppy outside without playing with it, and it will go to the bathroom and go right back to sleep in its crate.

2) Don't let your puppy out of the crate when it's barking or whining. This just rewards the pup for behavior you don't want. Under no circumstances should you "rescue" the puppy, because this just teaches it that if it shrieks long enough it will get its way. Wait until your puppy is quiet before letting it out. Once he starts to calm down and stops making noise, then let it out of the crate.

Tip: How To Handle Crate-Haters

There should be no barking in dog crates. If your dog continues to bark in its crate, go back to the basics and repeat the crate training steps. Your puppy may also need a bit more mental stimulation. If so, try increasing your pup's exercise so it's pleasantly fatigued before crate time.

For barking puppies 4 months and older, sometimes you just have to ignore the noise. Pups have more opinions as they get older, and if you know that your puppy is nearly crate trained, isn't hungry, or doesn't have to go to the bathroom, it's best to ignore him. The goal is to teach your puppy that a crate is a pleasant place to be.

Now if your puppy has a hard time whenever you leave the house; runs from room to room looking for you; or cries, whines or barks until you return, it will probably do the same thing if you put it inside a crate.

To make your puppy feel more at ease during your absence, try leaving for a short time, around 5 to 10 minutes. This way, your puppy quickly learns that you're coming back. Other puppies may just bark for a few minutes when you leave, but they'll eventually quiet down.

The Great Crate Debate: Why Your Dog Absolutely MUST Have A Crate (Part 5)

Are you ready for a quick and easy 5-step crate training plan for your pup? Repeat each of the following steps for one day or one week, depending on

how well your puppy takes to crate training. Move onto the next step once your pooch is confident with the previous step.

Day 1/Week 1: Introduce your puppy to his new crate by opening the door so it won't close on the dog accidentally. Be prepared to spend some uninterrupted time with your puppy and sit down next to the crate for a few minutes.

Put some toys and a blanket inside the crate. Your puppy will toddle over it. When it does, pick up a toy from the inside, show it to your puppy and gently toss the toy inside the crate so that it hits the back wall and makes a noise.

Chances are, your puppy will be curious about the toy and where the noise came from, and may walk over the threshold to check it out. If your puppy goes inside on its own, reward it by tossing in a little treat so it hits the back wall of the crate, too. Repeat the process a few times.

If your puppy doesn't go into the crate, toss some treats near the crate's door and encourage your puppy to eat the treats. As your puppy gets closer and no longer seems afraid of the crate, throw a few treats inside

and tell it to go get the cookie. Make a big fuss by saying, “Yeah, Yeah – Good Puppy!”

Day 2/Week 2: Take your puppy to the crate and toss some treats inside. When your puppy goes in the crate, verbally praise it again. Repeat this process several times. This is also a good time to put your puppy's food bowl inside and feed it a meal inside the crate, but leave the door open. Your puppy will begin to associate the crate with yummy experiences, which is a good thing. After a few meals, your puppy will run inside and wait for you to put the food bowl down.

Day 3/Week 3: When your puppy is comfortable with dining a la crate, try closing the door while it's eating. When it's done, open the door after a few minutes. Repeat at the next meal, but increase the amount of time the door is closed each time.

Day 4/Week 4: While feeding your puppy inside the carrier with the door closed, go to another room for a few minutes so you're out of sight of your puppy. When you return, let your puppy out. Repeat and gradually increase the time you're away.

Day 5/Week 5: In addition to feeding your puppy all of its meals inside the crate, try putting it inside after playtime and right before naps. Use a verbal command, such as “go get a cookie,” and toss some treats inside, making sure they hit the back wall noisily. When it goes inside after them, close the door for a few minutes. If your puppy settles down for a nap, walk away to another room. Repeat.

During the day, your puppy will be fine inside for up to about three hours. If you have to leave a young pup alone for an entire day and an outdoor area isn't available, try taking the door off the crate and putting pup and crate inside an exercise pen or a gated safe room. This way it can go in and out of the crate and still have the freedom to move around.