

Crate Training Your Dog

The key to housetraining your puppy is to reduce the possibility of accidents in the house. Crate training can help you with the process because dogs naturally do not soil their sleeping area.

If you properly crate train your puppy, he will be happy to spend time in his crate. A crate is a safe place for your puppy to go when you can't watch him closely.

Ideally, you should gradually accustom your puppy to his crate. To do this, follow the steps listed below:

- Put the crate in a busy location in your house such as the living room or kitchen where your family spends a lot of time. Put a blanket and toys inside and leave the door open. Occasionally, toss a treat in the back of the crate for your puppy to find on his own.
- Bring your puppy over to the crate and encourage him to go into the crate by throwing a treat just inside the door. When he puts his head in the crate to get the treat, praise him by saying "good boy." Continue this procedure but throw the treat farther and farther into the crate until the puppy is going all the way in. Praise him every time he goes in to get the treat.
- Next, try asking him to go into the crate — "Buster, get in your crate" as you motion with your hand. If he goes in, praise him and give him the treat. Then call him out (no treat for coming out) and do it again. Repeat this many times until he is reliably going in and out of the crate on command.
- When your puppy is reliably going in and out of the crate, you can start to close the door for short periods of time. Practice a couple of in and outs, but one time when he is inside, close the door. Praise him and give him food treats while he is inside, and then open the door and walk away (no treats for coming out). Repeat this over and over, slowly increasing the time the door is closed. Eventually, take a few steps away from the crate and then return and praise him while he is still inside. Slowly increase the distance you go away from the crate. Remember treats are only given when the puppy is inside. When letting him out of the crate, simply open the door and walk away.
- You are now ready to teach your puppy to stay quietly in his crate for a prolonged period of time. Put the crate next to your chair in the living room and prepare a chew toy stuffed with peanut butter. Ask your puppy to go into his crate, give him the chew toy, close the door and turn on the T.V. If he begins to cry, you should ignore him. If you let him out when he is crying, he learns that this is how to get out of the crate. After an hour or so, if he is quiet and settled in the crate, open the door. Remember, when letting him out of the crate, do not say anything, just open the door.
- At night, move the crate to your bedroom, ask the puppy to go inside, turn off the lights, and ignore any crying. Remember however that a young puppy may not be able to go all night without going to the bathroom. So if you hear him crying, he may need to go out. Use common sense!
- For the next few days, lock him in the crate when you are at home going about your normal business of making dinner, doing the laundry, etc. Be sure to give him a fun crate toy each time. Ignore any crying, whining or barking. When he is going in the crate without fuss and does not cry, you can start leaving him in the crate when you leave the house. Puppies under 6 months of age should not be expected to stay in a crate and not eliminate for longer than 3-4 hours at a time. You will be able to increase the time he is expected to "hold it" as he gets older.
- A good 'rule of thumb' is that your puppy can only "hold it" for the number of hours he is in age plus one. So if your pup is 3 months old, he can only be expected to hold it for four hours.