Crate Training

Purdue University Animal Behavior Clinic

Crate training means to teach your puppy that he has a safe and secure area of his own. A crate is a valuable tool for housebreaking, preventing destructive behavior, and keeping your puppy safe when you cannot watch him. Your puppy's crate is a place for him to go to get away from the crazy human world.

Kinds of Crates

Wire and plastic are the two most common crate types. The fold-up wire crates are quite easy to transport, but many puppies prefer the "closed in" den-like area that a plastic crate offers. It is useful to cover a wire crate with a blanket to help give this effect.

The crate should be large enough for your puppy to stand, stretch out, and turn around. If your puppy will be a large dog, it would be a good idea to purchase a crate that will be the correct size to accommodate him as an adult. Your puppy may eliminate in a crate that is too large; therefore, block the rear area of the crate off with a cardboard box or a moveable wall until he is fully housebroken.

When to Use a Crate

Your puppy should be in his crate anytime that you cannot be watching him. Occasionally, life can become very hectic - you may be trying to feed the children their breakfast, find their lost book bags and shoes, and get the children off to school on time. During this time, your puppy may be grabbing food from under the table, stealing socks, and basically learning things you do not want him to learn. Ask yourself during these times - what am I teaching my puppy? If you do not like the answer, put your puppy in his crate and when the situation has calmed down, teach him the behaviors you need him to learn.

Most puppies have a natural instinct to keep their "den area" clean. Never force your puppy to eliminate in his crate by expecting him to "hold it" longer than he is physically able. A young puppy should not be crated for more than three to four hours maximum at a time, except overnight.

Never use your puppy's crate as punishment. Your puppy should learn that going to his crate is fun and rewarding, not a punishment.

Training Your Puppy to Love His Crate

Begin by placing the crate with the door open in an easily accessible area. Toss treats into the crate and reward your puppy for getting the treat. Allow him to eat his meals in his crate with the door open so that he can leave any time he wishes. Hide special toys in his crate such as chew bones and stuffed Kong toys. Encourage your puppy to explore his crate to find these treasures. Any time your puppy enters his crate on his own, make sure to make a big hoop-la over the event! As your puppy becomes accustomed to his crate and enters on his own, begin shutting the door for a second or two (without latching the door) while pushing a tasty treat through the cage door. Your puppy will begin to learn that the shutting of the cage door only means that he will get yet another treat. As your puppy progresses, begin latching the door and opening it immediately as you toss your puppy his reward. The next step is latching the door, leaving for brief moments, and rewarding your puppy for staying quiet with a treat.

* Never open your puppy's crate when he is barking or crying, or you will inadvertently teach him to vocalize in his crate.
* Keep a special toy on hand, such as a stuffed Kong toy, and only give it to your puppy when he is in his crate. This is comparable to putting a video game in your child's bedroom!
* Your puppy should spend some time in his crate when you are home. This will teach him that going to his crate does not always signal that you are leaving.