



THE CRATE: YOUR PUPPY'S HOME-WITHIN-YOUR-HOME

Teaching your pup to calmly rest in a short-term confinement area (a crate) has many benefits, primarily as an aid for housetraining and preventing separation issues. Once your dog is housetrained you won't need to confine her when you leave. However, it's a good idea to maintain crate skills throughout a dog's life by at least occasionally practicing brief periods of rest in a crate. These skills will serve your dog well over the course of her life whenever she needs to be confined, such as at the veterinarian, if the veterinarian prescribes crate rest for an injury or illness, when visiting the groomer or a boarding facility, or when traveling.

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Crate Location & Set-Up

When preparing the crate for your pup, consider the size, how it is 'furnished,' and where it is located.

Location

It is typically advised to start with the crate close by you. This way your pup can gradually become acclimated to the crate while in close proximity to you. As your pup develops a greater comfort level with resting calmly in the crate and playing with food stuffed toys, you can move the crate around the house to different areas so your pup develops a similar comfort level regardless of the location of the crate

Crate Size

Your pup should be able to stand up, turn around, lie down, shift positions and stretch out in her crate. If the crate is too small, she will be uncomfortable and reticent to spend time in it. If the crate is too big, it may not inhibit elimination – your puppy will simply eliminate in one corner and still have enough space to curl up in a different corner. If you chose your crate with your puppy's adult size in mind, be sure to use a safe crate divider so you can make it temporarily smaller.

BENEFITS OF CRATE SKILLS

Crate skills can aid in housetraining because dogs tend to strongly prefer to urinate and defecate away from the place where they sleep and eat.

Resting calmly in a crate can help a pup build bladder and bowel muscle control, which is necessary for housetraining.

Having a pup who rests calmly in a crate helps you predict when the pup will have to go potty – if she's been napping or playing with her chew toys in her crate for a period of time, she will likely have to eliminate when she comes out.

Pups that learn to rest calmly in a crate have the opportunity to learn to self-pacify when left alone. This means they are far less likely to suffer from separation issues.

Until a dog has learned house manners, brief bits of time in a crate happily working on a food-stuffed toy prevents them from engaging in an endless list of worrisome and potentially dangerous endeavors, including chewing, destroying, and possibly ingesting household items.

Helping your pup learn to rest calmly in a crate pup can be a beneficial skill if you want to travel with your dog (where they may be required to be in a carrier of some sort), if you intend on her going to a professional groomer (where they may be required to be crated), or if your veterinarian recommends crate rest for an injury or illness.

Bedding

Having a towel or some bedding in the crate can work for or against you. Bedding can help some pups settle down more easily. But for other pups it can become a problem, as the pup may eliminate on the absorbent surface and/or may chew on and ingest it. It is generally wise to consider starting out with no bedding. Puppies happily sleep on wood or tile flooring in a climate controlled home, and they can just as happily sleep comfortably in a crate with no bedding. Once you are confident you are beyond the stage where accidents in the crate may occur you may choose to add bedding. For puppies that are already used to having a bed, as long as they aren't eliminating in the crate or chewing the bedding, continue using it. However, be sure your puppy is truly not peeing on it by checking the bedding every time she comes out. Many small breed dogs eliminate in the crate such a small amount that it can go undetected by owners. So, check for any urine smells or stains by doing a look and sniff test.

Chew Toys

When in her crate your pup needs a form of occupational therapy to pass the time and burn off some mental energy when she isn't napping. We generally advise you give your pup at least two chew toy options, but some pups do better with three or more, dependent on their experience with crate rest and their personality and energy level. There are three general categories of dog toys. Some are ideal for use when your pup is resting in their crate, others are better suited for interactive play with your pup:

Food Stufferable Chew Toys: Durable, hollow chew toys are an ideal choice for crate time for your pup. Putting your pup's meals and healthy treats in the toys makes playing with them a more desirable activity for them, think of it like they are 'hunting' for their food. Some options to consider are The Comfort Bone, sterilized bones, the Busy Buddy Twist n' Treat, and the Monster Mouth.

Fully edible chews, like bully sticks, are also an option. But, be sure they are size and durability appropriate for your pup, as you don't want them to break off pieces that are too large for them to easily swallow.

Toys like stuffed animals, ropes, and balls also are not recommended for crate rest time as they can be a choking hazard. Furthermore, they generally will not do much good occupying your dog and keeping her happy if you aren't there to play fetch and tug with her.

Teaching Your Pup to Rest Calmly in the Crate

Despite being distant descendants of animals that rest in dens, most pups will not feel comfortable resting in a crate without our assistance. There are many differences between a den and a crate, not the least of which is that a wolf is not confined to a den and they typically rest in dens with littermates. So, it is a good idea to follow these steps to help your pup become gradually accustomed to her crate by starting with some crate games prior to using the crate for short-periods of confinement

Crate Games

1. To encourage your pup to calmly tolerate time in the crate, turn crate training into a game by following these steps and tips.
2. Keep your puppy on leash (so you can keep them close by) and have some tiny pieces of high value treats on hand.

Crate Games (cont.)

3. Sit on the floor right next to the crate and toss a couple of treats in so she is likely to step in to retrieve them.
4. When she goes in on her own without hesitation, turns around and looks at you (isn't it adorable when they look at you as if to say "this is what you want, right?") delay saying the marker word for a couple of seconds. This way she is learning to step into the crate and wait for the mark and reward.
5. Now you can start working on closing the crate door for just a moment before the mark and reward.
6. Gradually build up to having the door closed for longer bits of time, being sure to toss in the occasional jackpot of treats on the floor of the crate. Think of this like a bonus at work.
7. At this point you should be able to work on having your pup spend a few minutes in the crate with you close by as long as your pup has one or two food stuffed toys to play with.
8. As your pup is able to spend more time in the crate, be sure to remember that she should be brought immediately to her designated potty spot for elimination and reward after crate rest time.

Additional Tips

- 🦷 A good teacher (that's you!) goes slowly and makes things as easy as possible for their pup to succeed. While most pups have a natural sense of cleanliness and will keep their sleeping place clean, that instinct can be destroyed if the pup is left in her crate when she needs to eliminate and she has not yet developed sufficient bladder and bowel muscle control. In this case she is essentially forced to soil the crate. Once the pup decides the crate is where she is supposed to eliminate, you will have a much harder time with housetraining. So, make a point to begin using the crate for very short periods of times only when you are sure the pup is empty. As the pup matures you can gradually increase her time in the crate.
- 🦷 Help your pup learn to see the crate as a place to rest calmly and quietly by allowing them lots of opportunities to practice their self-pacifying skills in brief sessions throughout the day when you are home.
- 🦷 When you are leaving your puppy for periods of time that are longer than you feel she can calmly rest in the crate and 'hold it' have her rest in a long-term confinement area, such as an exercises pen or gated off bathroom or small kitchen. The crate should be in this area with the crate door open.
- 🦷 Feeding your pup at least one of her meals in the crate for a while and always giving her at least two food stuffed chew toys to keep her occupied will aid in helping her learn to tolerate, and even enjoy, short periods of time in her crate. If you were given \$500 every time you walked into your bedroom, you would love going there. The same holds true for your pup, except her version of \$500 is meals and toys stuffed with healthy treats.
- 🦷 Once your dog is housetrained you do not need to confine her to her crate. However, most dogs develop a strong attachment to their crate and it is a good idea to keep it in your home so your adult dog has opportunities to rest there and maintain their crate skills.