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Your Smart Dog The Crate is Great! July 2006

The most frequent complaints I hear from dog owners are about dogs who chew, steal from the counter, destroy the house, and have bathroom accidents. Most of these dogs are fine when people are home, but the minute the people leave, all bets are off! Everyone wants a simple solution and I have it – teach your dog to like his crate. . . and then use it!

Who Needs A Crate?

Almost every dog will be crated at some point in its life. Even if you don't want to use a crate for your dog, your veterinarian, groomer, or kennel will, so it's best to teach your dog early that crates are great. Raising a puppy is a lot of work – and double the effort if you aren't utilizing a crate. The crate is so valuable that I can't imagine NOT using one. Crating helps with housetraining, prevents destructive chewing and keeps your pup safe when you can't watch him.

Teach your dog to like his crate... and then use it!

Adult dogs also benefit from crate training. Dogs left alone during the day get bored, so they find ways to entertain and amuse themselves, which usually involves draperies, table legs, and knick-knacks. If you're lucky, the dog will only have destroyed material things and not gotten into something harmful. Some dogs chew from stress, others from boredom. In either case, a crate helps minimize the damage – to you and your dog.

When to Crate

Long after your dog is housetrained and trustworthy in the house alone, crate training is still useful. Here are some examples of when you might crate your dog.

Safety – The crate can be used to keep the dog safely inside if people will be in and out of your house (guests, workers, kids, etc.). The crate also serves to

keep your dog safe while you are away from home – knives, cleaning supplies, and Tylenol are just a few things around your house that could prove deadly if Fido found them.

The crate helps prevent problems before they have a chance to begin – and gives you peace of mind while you can't keep an eye on your dog.

Management – The crate is a good babysitter for your dog. If you're busy outside or in another part of the house, the crate will keep your dog out of your way (and out of trouble). If you're having guests over, crating your dog prevents havoc at the door and also ensures that your dog can't slip outside as guests are coming in.

Problem Prevention – Crating your dog keeps him from chewing your wood trim, digging the carpets, and barking endlessly at the birds outside. The crate helps prevent problems before they have a chance to begin – and gives you peace of mind while you can't keep an eye on your dog.

Crate Safety

There are a couple of rules to follow to ensure safe crating.

1. No collars. Collars can be easily caught or twisted on the crate and could lead to strangulation.
2. No rawhides in the crate (unless you can provide supervision). Dogs can choke easily on rawhides and should never be left alone while chewing them.
3. Regularly check the chew toys in the crate for signs of damage or wear. Throw away any toys that have hanging strings (choking hazard) or damaged pieces.



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4. Check the crate periodically for sharp edges or broken wires.
5. No broken crates – if your crate is being held together with duct tape and bungee cords, buy a new one!
6. Be sure the crate is the right size for your dog – there should be enough room for your dog to stretch out, and turn around.
7. Provide water for your dog.

Crate Training Your Dog

By nature, dogs are den animals, but that doesn't mean your dog will automatically love his crate! It's a fairly easy process to acclimate your dog to his crate.

Make the crate great. The easiest way to accustom your dog to his crate is to create a positive association with it. This is most easily done by putting all of your dog's meals inside the crate. In the beginning, keep the door open and allow the dog to go in and out as he pleases. Again, by using breakfast and dinner, this is usually an easy task. Another tool is to stuff a toy (Kong® for example) with some really yummy goodies (such as a smear of peanut butter) and put the dog and the food-stuffed toy in the crate. This really yummy goody only shows up in the crate and is enjoyed only in the crate. This teaches the dog that all good things come from within the crate.

Start slowly. In addition to getting your dog used to going in the crate, you also need to teach him how to stay in there. You'll go about this slowly. After your dog is used to going in and out for his dinner, you can begin closing the door when he's eating. Before he finishes, open the door so he can exit when he's finished.

Reward silence. If you're late in opening the door and your dog whines or barks to get out, ignore him and wait for a few seconds of silence before opening the door. If you let your dog out while he's fussing, he'll think that fussing is the way to get out – definitely not a habit you want your dog to learn.

Practice regularly. You can work on this between feeding time by tossing a tasty treat into the crate. Close the door for a moment, and then let your dog out. Ignore him when he comes out – no cooing, petting, or playing. Toss another treat in and again

briefly close the door. Within just a few trials, your dog will begin getting the picture that the crate is a pretty good place to be!

Crate training is covered in-depth in the SDU course *Smart Puppy*. Another course starts on Wednesday, July 11. A few spots remain open, so if you're interested, register today to save your spot!

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Helping good dogs become great dogs.

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