

# Your Smart Dog

## Crate Training Isn't Just for Puppies

*Older Dogs Benefit, Too.*

**I'm headed to a Nose Work camp in September with my Labrador, Tango.** For camp, dogs need to be comfortable being crated in another room. Tango's an eight year old released service dog. He's never really spent much time in a crate because he was always with me in public until his release from service work. By then he was reliable in the house and didn't need crating.

**Camp isn't until September giving me time to teach Tango to relax and enjoy the crate.** But I'm starting now. Right now.

**This month's newsletter will cover** *why* you might want to teach your dog how to be crated, *how to choose* a crate, and *how to teach* your dog to like the crate.

### WHY CRATE?

**Why would you want to teach your dog to crate?** Your

dog is reliable in the house while you're gone: doesn't have accidents, doesn't rip up anything, or get into trouble.

**That's great. For now.**

**As your dog gets older,** though, he may develop incontinence or cognitive dysfunction.

Or maybe you're having work done inside your house and it's not safe to let him roam the house.

He may tear an ACL and need 8-weeks of crate rest. Or maybe you get new carpeting and the dog simply can't leave it alone -- digging and ripping it up while you're at work. Or, like me, you need to take your dog with you somewhere and crating is required.



### Think About...

Making the crate fun for your dog is the key to successful training. Take care to avoid:

- Using the crate for punishment or time-outs.
- Leaving the dog crated for extended periods, particularly early in the training.
- Excessive praise when the dog is allowed out of the crate. If you have a party when he comes out, then going in is less fun.

### CRATE SAFETY TIPS

Crates are generally safe, but there are a few things to think about before leaving your dog alone:

- Take your dog's collar off before crating. The collar -- or tags -- can get stuck and your dog could panic and strangle.



- Leave only chew-proof toys with your dog in his crate.
- If your dog is likely to chew his bed, don't put any bedding in the crate.
- Place the crate in a safe place -- don't leave the dog outside in the crate.

## WHICH CRATE?

**There are a lot of things to think about when deciding which crate is right for your dog.** The first is size. The crate should be big enough for the dog to fit comfortably. He should be able to stand in the crate without ducking his head. The crate should be as deep as your dog is long - he should fit all the way in without having to bend. Your dog should be able to turn completely around in the crate, as well as able to lay comfortably in the crate. Measure your dog from nose to rump to determine his length, and from toe to head to determine his height. Crates usually have measurements and recommendations by breed size to help you choose the correct size.

**There are many crate styles to choose from,** as well: wire mesh, plastic or “airline”, soft-sided, and “furniture-style.” The two most portable styles are the wire mesh and the soft-sided crates. If you travel by car frequently, those might be your best bets.

The *wire mesh* crate is just that: the “bars” of the crate are metal and the dog can easily see through the crate. Some dogs can chew or bend the bars to get out. It’s a good all-purpose crate for most dogs.

The *plastic, “airline”* crate is a durable crate made of solid plastic with openings to allow air to flow through the crate. This crate is the sturdiest of all the crates and is the most secure. It’s especially good for timid dogs benefit from some “screening” from the outside world.

The *soft-sided* crate is the least secure, least sturdy of the crates, but is also the most portable. These crates have a metal frame on which a canvas and mesh fabric fits. A large

portion of the sides, door flap, and ceiling flap are mesh so the dog can see out very easily. This crate is **not chew- or escape-proof**. This crate is recommended only for those dogs who won’t try to dig or chew to get out of their crate.

Finally the *furniture style* crate is the newest addition to the market. These are crates designed to look like living room furniture. They usually have a wooden exterior with a wire crate on the inside. They are not easily portable.

**If you’re not sure** how your dog will do in a crate, the airline or wire mesh crates are the most secure choices.

## HOW TO TEACH?

**Feed all your dog’s meals in the crate with the door open.** If you give your dog treats throughout the day, toss them into the crate. We want the dog to think that all good things come from inside that crate.

**As your dog begins to get more comfortable** with going in the crate, you can close the door while he’s eating his meals. Be sure to open the door before he’s finished, so he can exit immediately.

**To extend the amount of time** your dog spends in the crate with the door closed, get your clicker and some really fantastic treats. (Steak, salmon, sardines, chicken – the good stuff!)

**Feed your dog his meal in the crate and close the door.** As he finishes his meal, wait two seconds. Click and toss the treat into the crate if your dog remained calm in the closed crate. Repeat the two second wait, always clicking and treating calm responses. Gradually raise your criteria by waiting a few seconds longer before each click and

treat. Your sessions should be a minute or two, then click and release your dog from the crate.

**Always make his going into the crate cause for a party.** While his exit from the crate should be quite boring. As your dog gets more comfortable in the crate, you can begin to move further from the crate. When you change one criterion -- distance from the crate -- make sure you reduce your other criteria (amount of time spent in the crate).

**Working in short sessions** over the course of a month or two, you’ll have your dog looking forward to his crate time!

I’ll be video-taping my crate training sessions with Tango. Check out the Smart Dog Blog to see other crate training solutions. Find a qualified positive reinforcement trainer and get started today!

Happy training!

Laurie Luck

Faculty, Karen Pryor Academy for Animal Training & Behavior  
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