

CRATE TRAINING

One of the most important aspects of training a new dog (or helping an old one become good), is managing the dog's environment, making sure that during the training process, your house stays intact, and your temper under control. No one can watch their dog all the time, but some dogs really need to be watched. And their actions monitored. Puppies have accidents (as do some adult dogs), and all untrained dogs will get into trouble if left unsupervised. In fact, it's amazing how much trouble a dog can get into in the space of just a few minutes. A crate is one way to monitor your dog when your attention is elsewhere. It's a way for her to be "good" whether she wants to be or not! It can be used for house-training, for behavior modification, and for a sleeping place. It is not a substitute for attention, training, or exercise —which all dogs need every day.

The crate itself is just an indoor dog house - big enough for her to stand up, lie down and turn around in, placed in a much used area of the house such as the living room or kitchen, it can be made of plastic, wire, wood or a combination of all three.

Crates are not appropriate for all dogs, nor for all dog problems. However, most learn to like their crates, if introduced slowly and with positive reinforcement.

NOW THAT YOU'VE DECIDED TO GET A CRATE, WHAT SIZE IS RIGHT?

Avoid getting one that is too big, even though you may think you're being kind. The dog should be able to stand up, turn around, and stretch out somewhat in the crate. If you're using it for house-training, a crate that is big enough so that the puppy can relieve herself at one end, and curl up for a nap in the other is too big. If you have a pup, and you want to use the crate throughout the dog's life, put a cardboard box at the far end of the crate, and a blanket at the near end. When the puppy gets bigger, the box comes out.

HOW DO I MAKE HER LIKE HER CRATE?

Start off by feeding her in the crate with the door open. If she is afraid of it, put the food just outside the crate, then slowly move her dish inside the crate over a period of several meals. Once she's comfortable with that idea, then close the door while she's eating. When she's finished, open the door and let her out. Now begin giving her a "cue" or "command" that tells her she's supposed to go into the crate. Most people say "Kennel," but any word you choose is fine, as long as you're consistent. If she still balks at going in, rub some peanut butter on the back of the crate for her to lick. When she's in, close the door and leave it closed for a couple of seconds. Then cue her to come out, and play for a little while.

Try to put her in and take her out of her crate with little emotion; if she whines, don't pay any attention to it. Above all, don't sympathize with her - that will just reinforce the whining.

When she's comfortable in the crate, stop feeding her in it, and begin leaving her in for longer and longer periods of time. It's best to have her sleep in the crate. At first, you may wish to put it right beside a family member's bed. Dogs are pack animals, and feel most comfortable near a "pack member." Then, if she does whine, you can just put your fingers inside the crate to show her you're there. If you don't wish to have her sleep in your room, gradually move it out as she gets more and more used to the crate.

HOUSE-TRAINING

If you're using the crate for house-training a puppy, make sure you don't leave her in there longer than she can hold her bladder. Young pups have to eliminate every couple of hours, right after they play, right after they sleep, and right after they eat! At about three months, they can usually sleep through the night in the crate. At about four months, they can begin holding their bladder and bowels for longer periods of time during the day. Remember that the crate is there as an aid—it's not a place for her to live, she should be out playing with you most of the time; use the crate when you can't watch her, or it's time for a nap or bed.