

## Introducing Your Dog to the Crate

No matter what type of crate you decide to purchase it is crate size that is the issue of importance. You want your dog to have enough room to lie down comfortably and turn around, but did you know that the crate should never be too large?



When a crate is too large for a dog they may start to use one area of the crate to sleep and another to eliminate. Not all hope is lost if you have purchased a larger crate so that it will fit your growing puppy as an adult. Just use a divider which allows you to confine your puppy to a smaller area of the crate, then you can make the area larger as your puppy grows.

Crate training should be kept positive so introducing your puppy or adult dog to the crate slowly has the best results. Start off by placing something soft in the bottom of the crate, along with a couple of your dog's toys. It is important to let your dog explore the crate at his own pace—do NOT force him inside. Instead, toss a treat or two inside and praise him when he voluntarily enters the crate. Eventually you will use a command marking the behaviour, like “go to your crate”, using this command *when he is on his way in*. Tossing him a cookie at each of these times will make this a positive place. Be sure to keep the door open letting your dog wander in and out as he wishes.

Once your dog is comfortable with the crate, it is time to start getting him used to being confined. Once again, throw some treats into the crate—when your dog is inside, close the door. Wait a minute or so and then open the door. Be careful to ONLY let him out when he is quiet. Slowly start to extend the amount of time you leave your dog in the crate. For some dogs it is easier to adjust to the crate when they are in the same room as the rest of the family, others will calm down faster when they are in another room. Don't rush this experience and constantly vary the time the dog is confined.

Don't use the crate for punishment. You want to make the crate a safe and happy place, as it is the location he will sleep in and where he will go when you're not home. To be his sanctuary it cannot be a place for punishment as it will lose its value. If you do start using it as a punishment his crate will no longer be a safe place instead it will not only breed resentment but it can also create unwanted and destructive behaviour.

To minimize separation anxiety, always practice leaving your dog alone. Gradually build up the amount of time you are out of the room, until your dog or puppy is comfortable being left alone in his crate for an hour or more. Then you can start to leave the house for extended periods of time on a regular basis.

Remember to take your dog outside as soon as you let them out of their cage, especially if you're working on potty training. By creating a routine you will provide them with a sense of security and stability thereby relieving separation anxiety and destructive behaviour.

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