

A Crate Can Be Great: The Benefits of Crate Training

Crates can be training and safety devices and can benefit dog and owner alike. Crating on a humane schedule teaches puppies bladder and bowel control and limits the amount of destruction a chewing puppy can do to a home. Also dogs that are crated in a car are more likely to survive an auto accident and less likely to cause one.

What Type, Size of Crate

The most common types are molded plastic airline shipping crates and the open-wire types that usually come with a metal tray on the bottom. For owner who plan on doing a lot of air travel with their dogs, the molded plastic variety is best. Wire crates are preferred in most other instances.

The size of the crate is based on the size of your dog. There should be enough room for him to stand up, turn around in a small circle and lie down comfortably. The crate serves as a place where the dog can rest and chew on safe, appropriate toys. It is not an exercise pen.

If you plan to use the crate as a housebreaking aid, size is key. If there is room for the animal to soil and then live away from the mess, the crate doesn't serve its purpose. If you're buying a crate for a puppy, keep the adult dog's size in mind, but excess room should be cordoned off with Plexiglas or another type of barrier.

How Long Should You Crate

The rule of thumb for crating is no longer than one hour per each month of age up to nine to 10 hours maximum (the average work day). Each session should be preceded and succeeded by an hour of aerobic exercise. If this is too long for your dog, hire a dog walker to exercise him mid-day.

Before you leave your dog for a long stretch, make sure you have him used to the crate. A dog who panics when left alone in the crate could damage it or himself. Never crate your dog while he is wearing any sort of correction collar: It could easily get caught on something in the crate and choke the animal.

Crating is recommended as part of the workday routine until the dog grows out of adolescence (at approximately 18 months of age), for dogs who are heavy chewers or are otherwise destructive. Proceed slowly when it's time to wean your dog off the crate; leave him alone for just a few hours at a time. And think twice before leaving a curious adolescent alone in your home, even if it's behaving well during the day.

Puppies and Crates

Avoid relying too heavily on the crate for a puppy's early months. Most puppies three and a half to four months old can be crated overnight for about six hours, even though they probably cannot yet display that kind of bladder control during the daytime. Younger dogs crated at bedtime will need to be brought to their papers or outdoors at least once in the middle of the night.

Source: Jacque Lynn Schultz, CPDT