

The Crate and Housetraining

Many branches of the canine race use dens for birthing and shelter and this instinct is prevalent in our dogs. The crate provides shelter and security for Fido in our home and a safe means to transport him in our vehicles. If you ever board your pooch or she must stay at a groomer's or vet's office, a crate will surely be her housing, being used to the comfort and security of the crate at home will make her stay in the vets' cage less stressful.

Crates come in a variety of styles and materials. Some are hard plastic and because of their light weight may be more suitable for airline or car travel. Others are made of heavy wire and come in several colors that help them go with the room where they are kept. Our crates are a beige or almond color and blend nicely in the kitchen. Don't make the common mistake of buying your crate too large. Your dog should be able to stand and turn around inside and that is about it. Another oft made error is putting your 10 pound pup into a crate sized for him as an 80 pound adult. This may result in him sleeping in one end and fouling the other, thus defeating one of the main purposes of the crate. Some crates are built with a divider so that as pup grows, so does the crate. If you don't have one like that, add a temporary plywood divider that you can move to enlarge the space as needed.

As a housetraining tool the crate is indispensable. But don't expect your youngster to hold his bowels or bladder longer than he is able. A rule of thumb is roughly one hour for every month of age. If you find your pup has soiled her crate, it is your fault and this is a habit you do not want to start. If you have ever bought a pet shop dog, you may have experienced this crate soiling habit before. Here are some housetraining tips so you can avoid the crate soiling habit.

Dogs are very routine oriented. I would swear that my dog wears a watch because when it is her supper time, she lets us know. I bet your dog is the same way. The best habit to start with your pup is setting a regular schedule of feeding and exercising. One of the laws of nature is when food goes in one end, it comes out the other end soon after. So feed at the same time every day, and then exercise right after that. Also, take pup out after he wakes up and after he has had a play time. Notice I said, "take pup out". A sure fire way to set yourself up for a spot on the rug is to send your 3 month old pup out the back door to do his business by himself. Pups are easily distracted and he might forget why he went out. Do yourself a favor, even if you have a fenced yard, take the pup out on a leash to an established area of your yard where you want the toilet to be and tell your pup to go there. You decide what to say but say the same thing every time and tell your family to say the same thing every time. My dog urinates on command and this and the fact that she uses the same part of the yard for her toilet has made my life much easier. It took some time up front to establish these habits but the little effort early will pay dividends for years to come.

Another law of nature is that your pup is going to soil your carpet. When that happens, it is your fault. You did not follow the routine or you were not watching the pup closely enough. If you don't catch the pup mid-stream, any correction you make will only serve to confuse her. Don't try to convince me that the dog "knows she was bad" because of the

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guilty look on her face. Your dog looks “guilty” because of the look on your face and perhaps the volume and tone of your voice. Not because it “knows it was bad”. Here is a technique I have used successfully to minimize these accidents. After you have fed and exercised your pup and it is time for a play period in the TV or computer room, give her some time to romp around by herself. After about 30 minutes or so, hook on her leash and loop it on your ankle or wrist. Keep her close until it is time for her to return to the pen or crate. This does two things; one, you keep a better eye out for the sniffing and circling behavior that precedes the spot. Two, pup is less likely to soil that smaller area she is confined in by the leash

A final word on the crate; it should be a positive and happy place. Gradually get the pup used to it before he is confined in it. Never use it for punishment. Teach your kids that when the pup is resting in the crate it is to be left alone.

The crate provides an important house training tool in the early part of your dog’s life and for nearly all of its life provides a secure and comfortable place it can call its own whether in your kitchen, your SUV or in the motel near your hunting area.

Greg DuBois
grgdubois@comcast.net