



Potter's Angels Rescue

Crate training your dog

Before I begin with how to properly crate train your dog, I would like to dispel some of the common myths when it comes to using a crate with your dog. A crate should be a comforting place for a dog and should NEVER be used to punish a dog. When you use a crate as punishment you eliminate the possibility of using it for training because the dog will think they are being punished every time you put them in there, in turn, creating anxieties whenever you need to use the crate to run to the store or in other instances when you are not punishing them. It becomes very confusing to the dog if you use it for both positive and negative reinforcement, therefore, I suggest to never use it in a negative manner.

Dogs naturally like to have a “den” where they can go to for quiet time or where they can feel safe. I always have my crates open to my dogs so they can choose when they would like to escape the chaos of the household. Crating your dog is not a cruel thing to do if they are used correctly; in fact, many dogs prefer to have this safe place available to them in their home. The crate can be a very useful tool in working with many behavior issues, including house training and excessive chewing. The crate is NOT to be used as a cage to keep your animal in so that you “don’t have to deal with them” and if this is what you are using it for you should seriously reconsider whether you have chosen the right dog for your home.

To get the dog used to the crate in a positive manner you can hide little treats inside the crate so they get rewarded every time they go in it. For my dogs I will say “crate” and throw a few treats in there so they go in after them. Once they are in there I coax them with pets and more treats. Ahead of time, I will tuck treats into and around their bedding so it distracts them. While I am closing the door they are busy rummaging around for more treats. It is also important to leave them with some mental stimulation while they are crated. You can do this by providing them with chew toys that they get ONLY when they are in the crate. There are lots of treat dispensing toys on the market that make a dog work for their treat. You can also use a kong toy with peanut butter in it or a marrow bone (uncooked). NEVER leave a toy with your dog if they can tear it up and chew it into pieces (this can lead to a VERY expensive vet bill!).

When you take the dog out of the crate, pick up the “crate only” toys and put them out of reach. If they only get these special treats when they are crated they will look forward to them. If the toys are available to them all the time they will lose interest and crate time won’t seem so fun anymore.

The crate can also be a wonderful tool to introducing a new dog to your home and giving them the time they need to adjust to the new surroundings and other animals. I have a pack of 6 dogs

at my home so when I foster an animal introducing them individually is a daunting task, but it is important that I do it safely, which is where the crate often comes in handy. REMINDER: This needs to be done appropriately and on an individual basis. If the animal is showing signs of severe distress when in the crate then this is not the chosen method of introduction. If the animal seems comfortable in the crate, but then is very stressed by the presence of the other animals, it is best to move them to a quiet area and allow them to adjust to you and the scents of the other dogs without the direct sight and contact of the other dogs. With time you can introduce them one by one through the crate or outside on leash to determine which method of introduction will work better (see **Proper Dog Introduction** article). When I have a new dog that is fine in the crate and not stressed by the presence of my dogs, I leave them in the crate allowing them (and my dogs) time to get used to everyone. The important thing is not to rush the introduction. You don't want to start out on a bad foot with any of the dogs if avoidable. It is very important that all dogs be calm and relaxed BEFORE you allow them to meet outside of the crate.

House training with the crate

Crates should be large enough for the adult dog to stand, sit and stretch out. (Ideally for a puppy, you start with a smaller crate, or block off one end, so he can't use one end for sleeping and the other for eliminating.) A key principle is to teach you don't mess where you sleep and eat, thus it is vital that you do not set your dog up for failure by leaving them crated longer than they can refrain from eliminating.

Dogs that have been kept in one big pen are harder to housetrain, simply because they've been forced to soil their living/sleeping quarters. Place the crate in an area so he is with you, and part of family activities, even as an observer. Do not put him in the basement. Place the crate in the kitchen or family room—if possible move it around with you.

If possible, at night the crate should go in your bedroom. Not only does this provide comfort to the dog, but your own sleeping patterns will encourage the pup to slumber on instinct. If there is any fussing, you're there to deal with it.

I will never take a pup out of a crate when he is fussing, as that only teaches if he fusses enough, then he can come out. It rewards bad behavior. I wait till he stops fussing for about five minutes, and then take him out without a big welcome. You can give him a special chew toy or treat just for when he is in the crate. Be sure to give lots of praise when he's inside, lengthening the periods you leave him in. Your crate routine should begin as soon as you bring your puppy home. Close the puppy in the crate at regular one-to-two-hour intervals, and whenever he must be left alone, for up to three or four hours. A general rule of thumb for crating puppies, is they can "hold it" for one hour per month in age. Therefore, if you have an 8 week old puppy they should not be crated for any longer than 2 hours. No dog should be crated for more than 6 hours at a time.

Remember, putting your dog into a crate does not of itself housetrain a dog. To be successful, you want to prevent your puppy from making mistakes. Many people punish a dog like mad for messing in the house, and then virtually ignore the good behavior when they eliminate outside.

So you get a dog that learns it is wrong to mess in the house when the owner is present. Never clean up a mess when the puppy is watching.

To prevent mistakes, don't let your pup have the run of the house. He needs 100% active supervision. If you must leave the room, even for a phone call, crate him or take him with you.

The real reason for crate training, besides preventing problems, is to help you predict when the pup will need to eliminate, so you can take him to the correct spot. The first step is to start a regular feeding schedule. Confine him after eating for 10 to 15 minutes, and then take him to the elimination spot. I say "Go pee." They do understand, and will learn to pee on command. PRAISE him after he eliminates.

Then take him back in and play with him, or if he likes it outside, play with him outside, or take him for a walk. If he really likes it outside, and you continually take him inside after eliminating, he will learn to HOLD it to extend his outside time. If you plan to take him for a walk, then he should do his eliminating at home, before you go. Many people take their pups for a walk, and as soon as they eliminate, they bring the dog home, thus sending the message that they are going home because the dog eliminated. If you want to start your walk right away, do not turn around and head home as soon as he poops.

After a half hour of play, crate him for a nap. Every hour (or so as he ages) take him out to pee. If he pees, give him play time, if not, back into crate. Just remember prevention of mistakes, and rewarding for good behavior. Prevention is done with prediction of when they will need to go, so it is good to know that puppies commonly eliminate after eating, napping, and a good play session.

6 weeks—elimination every hour

2 months—pup should have 2 to 3 hours of control

3 months—4 hours

4 months and up—5 hours

Always take the puppy out the same door, the one you are going to want him to signal at. Bells work great for some owners. Hang bells on the door, and give them a kick every time you open the door. Some dogs can be quiet, and stand at the door and look at it, some will let out a little yip, but others rely on you to see them standing at the door. So bells can be a marvelous tool. They will learn to swat them to get the door to open. Others use doggy doors. But a young pup can never be sent out to pee, he must be taken out by you so he can be rewarded appropriately.