

YOUR NEW BEST FRIEND: CRATE TRAINING

Crate training is a great way to give your dog a safe environment, especially as he is acclimating to a new space and family. Dogs are naturally den animals and often prefer a close, cozy space, so crates can provide a sense of security which relaxes and reassures them. Check out the steps below for the most effective crate training:

Choose the right crate: A crate needs to be durable and comfortable for your dog to sleep and spend time in. Some dogs prefer the darkness of crates with more solid sides (like an airline crate), while others prefer a mesh crate. One of the most important criteria is size: it should be big enough for your dog to stand up, turn around, and comfortably lay, but not too big that it is no longer "den-like". If you're buying a crate for a growing puppy, try to get a crate that will work for the projected adult size and use dividers to keep the space the right size as he grows.

Creating the right mindset: You want your dog to think of the crate as his safe place where he is calm and relaxed. When your dog is in a quiet state of mind, bring him into the crate for small intervals of time. Start with 10-15 minutes and gradually work to longer periods as he becomes more comfortable. Reward him with a treat when he enters the crate. Keep the crate door open in between training times—you will probably find your dog going in his crate to sleep of his own volition. This is a great sign that he is comfortable there!

Asses his needs: Some dogs will destroy a fluffy bed, while others will pee on soft or paper-like surfaces if they are still working on housebreaking. It's not bad if your dog needs to sleep on only the crate mat. Many dogs prefer firm surfaces, and this will keep him from associating the crate with anything other than a quiet place for him to relax. Regardless, bed the crate to his preference to keep him comfortable.

Supervise them at first: Your dog might not be used to a crate at first, and will need to be supervised. If he is building anxiety as he's in there and getting destructive, you need remove him and redirect his energy. If he is in the crate for too long during the day, he may soil his bedding. Just keep an eye on him to make sure he's relaxed and not creating bad habits. Additionally, keep him "naked"—no collars or harnesses in the crate. This is critical for safety as it is easy for a tag to get stuck on the crate as the dog sleeps and then cause a panic when he cannot get up.

Increase time gradually: Once you know your dog is comfortable in his crate, go slowly to increase the time he spends there. If he will be in it for a long time, you can give him frozen stuffed toys (like Kongs) or LickiMats to give him something to do.

Be patient! Crate training can take a few months! Calm, consistent training will help things go as smoothly as possible.

