

THE MARVELOUS CRATE

Any wild canine will secure a small, snugly fitting space to call its own. This space represents security to the dog. In its den, it cannot be attacked or bothered, so it is able to relax fully. This instinctive desire for a secure den is the basis of the psychology behind using a crate as a training aid. Once the pet owner has overcome his own prejudice against "caging" a pet and accepted the sound reasoning behind crate-training, the owner and his dog can begin to enjoy the benefits of the marvelous crate.

To accustom your dog to its new crate, prop open the door and allow the dog to explore the confines of the crate. Placing food or a favorite object inside will encourage it to step in. When the dog is comfortable, close the door and keep it confined for about 5 or 10 minutes. When you let the dog out, do it unceremoniously. Releasing the dog should not be a major production.

Each time you put the dog in the crate, increase the time it is confined. Eventually, the dog can be confined for up to four hours at a time. If the crate also serves as the dog's bed, it can be left crated throughout the night. Don't overuse the crate, though. Both you and your dog should think of it as a safe haven, not as a prison.

Use the soothing effect of the crate to convey to your dog that it is bedtime. Many dogs will learn to go directly to their crates when they are ready to call it a day. Often, the use of a crate will convince a restless dog to stop howling at the moon or barking at every little sound, allowing their owners to sleep through the night undisturbed.

Many dogs receive their meals in their crates. Finicky eaters are made to concentrate on the food that is offered and, as a result, overcome their eating problems. For the owners of more than one dog, the crate serves as a way to regulate the food intake of each dog. If dogs in the same household have different diets, crate feeding is almost essential. It can also make mealtimes less stressful if you have a dominant dog that tries to keep the others in the household away from the food bowls.

Housebreaking is made easier when the wise owner relies on the help of a crate. Until the dog is dependably housetrained, it should not be given the opportunity to make a mistake. A healthy dog will not soil its den -- the place where it sleeps. If the crate is the right size for your dog -- allowing just enough room to stand up and turn around, it will not soil its crate. If you purchase a crate for a puppy based on the size of the mature dog, you may need to block off one end to keep the puppy from sleeping in one corner and using the other for elimination.

Any time you cannot keep a close watch on the puppy, kindly place it in its crate. When the dog eliminates at the proper time, reward it. With the assistance of a crate, housetraining can be almost painless for you and your puppy.

The crate is a safety seat for a traveling dog. You may know that shipping a dog requires a crate, but do you realize that a crate in your car serves, as a seatbelt would, to protect your dog in the event of an accident? A dog thrown out of the car or through a windshield has little chance of surviving. In the event you or a passenger need medical care during an accident, a crate will keep the dog from "guarding" you from paramedics.

If you need to ship your dog by air, the task will be much easier if the dog is already used to its crate. A crate-trained dog is relaxed and less likely to need sedation for traveling. Avoiding sedatives removes one of the major risks of air travel for dogs, and your dog will be alert and happy when it lands.

When you travel and have to leave your dog behind, the caretaker will have a much easier time caring for a crate-trained dog or she will appreciate being able to confine the dog for rest periods and when the dog is dangerously underfoot. Your dog will also enjoy being able to take its crate (and a little bit of home) with it if it must spend time in a strange place.

No untrained dog should be given the run of the house while its owner is away. This is not only foolhardy from the standpoint of protecting your belongings but also from the standpoint of protecting the dog. An untrained dog could chew through an electrical cord, get trapped under a piece of furniture it has upset, or be poisoned or choked by a piece of trash. Use a crate to protect the untrained dog from itself. Of course, this means you will have to limit your time away from home. A puppy must be taken out at regular intervals to exercise and take care of business.

If your dog becomes ill or needs surgery, confinement in a crate will assure it the extra rest it needs during the recovery period. The wonderful crate can serve as a hospital bed too.

In dozens of different ways, the addition of a crate means better care for your dog. It reinforces consistency in training. It helps the dog feel more secure. It makes having strangers in the house less hectic. It makes travel safer and more comfortable. It makes bringing up a puppy as easy as it can be. Once you have experienced the benefits of crate-training your dog, you will question how you ever lived without that marvelous crate.