

CRATE TRAINING by Kathleen Dillon



Move Over Rover!

Our granddaughter at one year of age and 9 month old pup. To crate train or not to crate train, I can't tell you how many times I've heard that question.

There was a time during my life with dogs that I would have advised, and did myself opt for, other methods of housebreaking my pups. Not so today.

Being the soft hearted person that I am, I didn't think I could deal with the sad eyes and cries of a pup put in a kennel for the night. Instead, I dealt with the cries of a pup in my bedroom at night, no matter the nice soft pallet I put by the side of my bed. Pup wanted to curl up next to mom and dad- and wasn't shy about letting me know it most of the night!

Of course, we all know that if you don't want a forty pound dog sleeping with you, you shouldn't start off letting him sleep with you as a pup. So I'd wind up hanging my arm off the edge of the bed, with the pallet right next to my side of the bed, so the pup would be happy and I could get some sleep. (I say "I" because my husband was able to sleep through all this!) We were very lucky if there were no accidents before morning. Several years ago I became weary of this method, and the other means of housebreaking, so I decided to give crate training a try and see how the pup and I both liked it. I am now a firm proponent of crate training.

If you decide to use crate training for your new pup, do not use the kennel as a means of punishment. Used correctly it is an effective housebreaking tool for the owner and for the dog it becomes their "den" - a place of safety and rest, a place they'll choose to go when they're tired or want to get away from the household commotion.

You'll find that as they get older they'll actually enter the crate on their own to nap if you leave the door ajar. This is "their own space", a place of safety, rest and refuge.



Start off with an intermediate sized kennel or one that comes with a divider, then graduate to a large kennel after a couple of months. Dogs naturally do not like to soil their "den" or bedding. Therefore, your pup will do its best not to relieve itself in the crate. However, it must be understood that pups are like babies and their muscles have not matured enough to give them the bladder control you can expect of an adult dog. Accidents can and will happen in the crate. Don't expect him to remain in the crate hours on end without being let out. Let the pup out at night before he's kenneled and let him out immediately upon his arising in the morning. Putting on the coffee should come second.

When you put the pup in the crate say "kennel". That will begin to teach the command to kennel up. Where you place the crate is a personal decision. Be aware though that the first few nights of being in the crate your pup will probably protest, and may protest loudly. Each pup is an individual so how long they will cry before giving up and lying down to sleep varies. And generally after a few nights they begin to get used to the idea and they will at some point eventually enter the crate willingly. So if you want the crate in the bedroom but the crying is bothering you, start off with the crate in another room. When the pup is used to sleeping there you can then move the crate to your room.

There are three times you should automatically plan on having to take your pup outside: immediately after he's eaten, right after he wakes from sleeping or napping, and after a play time. The rest of the time you need to be watchful and learn to recognize the signs of preparing to find a spot that will be unique to your pup. Don't leave your pup loose and unattended in the house. If you have to go outside for a short time, or make a quick run to the grocer's, put him in his kennel. When you let him out, take him outside immediately. And when you let them out of the kennel, pick the pup up and carry him outside. Because of the bladder control issue, when a pup has to go he has to go. So if you open the crate door and expect him to follow you to the door, you'll find that he will stop along the way to relieve himself quickly. As time goes by you'll be able to stop carrying the pup, but for the first couple of weeks or so carrying him is the best idea. As you're going out the door repeat whatever command you will use, whether that's "outside" or "potty" or whatever you prefer. Keep it simple. Once they have done their business bring the pup back in the house right away. Don't let them play during this trip.

Consistency is the key factor in housebreaking. Take them to the same door, say the same thing to them, praise them when they've finished, take them back in the house immediately when they're done. You don't want them to associate going outside for potty time as play time. Don't punish or scold your dog for accidents you didn't see happen, the thirty second rule applies. If you catch him starting to go inside, just pick him up and tell him "outside", take him out and let him finish. Then praise him and bring him in.

Be patient. Some pups are housebroken in a couple of weeks, others it takes longer. Some of that has to do with the maturing of their bladder control. The majority of how long it takes has to do with how consistent and attentive you've been in your efforts.

This is the first step in your pup's training and the rewards will more than out weigh any temporary inconvenience. Remember while you're in your robe and slippers out there with your newest member of the family, that the investment you're making will be repaid by a decade or more with a happy, well adjusted companion that can be included in the home with the family, taken to someone else's home or taken into a motel room without worry.