

Crate Training

Easy As 3.14159 (Pi)



Crate Training

Easy As 3.14159 (Pi)

Introduction	3
Common Mistakes	5
What To Buy	8
Where To Put The Crate(s)	11
Night Time Crating	13
What Should Be In A Crate	14
When To Use The Crate With Puppies	15
Countering Time In The Crate When You're Outside The Home	16
Additional Tips and Tricks	17
The Fearful Of Crates/High Anxiety Dog	19
Tips For Desensitizing The Seriously Crate Averse Dog	22
Alternatives to Typical Crates for the Crate Fearing Dog	27

Introduction

Whether introducing a crate to a young or older dog a crate should never be used from the perspective of time outs or other forms of punishment or a means of trying to wreck a puppy or dog's freedom. It is a temporary tool used when we simply can't physically be in a position to wreck the dog's freedom to make the sort of mistakes that will impact future freedoms.

If it weren't because all it takes to become a breeder of dogs we wouldn't have to crate train dogs at all. They'd arrive in their new homes already crate trained and in a manner in which they have bonded to the idea that a crate is a sanctuary. Real breeders begin to introduce crates in ways that reinforce their denning instinct rather than setting them up to what for some becomes a horrifying experience.

For example, the real breeders constantly move pups regularly into crates for naps, treats, meals, to find their toys etc. They also either include a crate in the price of the dog or ask the owners to provide a crate as early as possible so they can begin the process.

But this is very much the exception rather than the rule, so if it has been left to you here's what I recommend:

First, stop thinking cage or crate and start thinking den, sanctuary and playpen. Playpen in the sense of thing we use with toddlers when we need to keep them safe while we're completing a brief task that requires enough of our attention that we mightn't be able keep them from harm. Or doing something that they may find fun but isn't in their or your best long-term interests.

Always keep in mind that dogs are basically denning animals and crate or not, often gravitate to under tables, benches, under chairs, beds, in closets during times of stress or just to relax. Females of the species seek out dens to have and raise their young. When you encounter a dog that fears a crate, it's not the crate, it's the context the crate has been used.

Common Mistakes

Retiring The Crate Far Too Soon

Thinking the crate is something you use until the house training chewing is under control is the most common mistake of all. If you want to end up with the best dog possible you won't abandon crate use that early.

My recommendation is until your dog is a young adult (eighteen months of age minimum you still use the crate when you can't supervise (whether you're home or not) so you can prevent your dog from developing door rushing, window barking and a ton of other things that contribute to various uncivilized habits.

In fact, you'll probably never abandon having a crate about the house. Mind you once your dog is an adult you won't need a door on the crate as the dog should be able to come and go at will. Used correctly a crate will be a sanctuary brings some level of comfort. More in times of stress than perhaps are obvious day to day.

Most people end up needing to crate their dogs from time to time. Post surgical procedures for example. Dogs do acquire injuries where the vet might recommend short or extended crate rest. Trips to the groomers or perhaps a boarding experience can have the level of stress mitigated somewhat if the dog's crate accompanies him or her. Moving from one home to another or being brought along on a vacation all can discombobulate a dog and a familiar sanctuary related place can go a long way to make the transition less stressful.

Creating An Unbalanced Context In The Favor Of Negative Associations

Many people place a crate in a central area which in itself isn't a bad idea at all. However, the puppy that finds him or herself in the crate only when everyone goes to bed or when every leaves the home is a puppy that is at some point going to be exponentially more likely to connect the crate with isolation as opposed to sanctuary. Mayhem will ensue.

There are two types of separation anxiety. One is connected to critical socialization period. The other is learned and what I just described is how it develops. The symptoms are every bit as real and severe. The irony of course is that the very thing should be bringing them a sense of solace has been used inadvertently to accomplish the opposite. More on how to balance things more appropriately in a bit.

Timeouts

Forget this nonsensical idea. This is another example of the sort of pseudo-science and neophyte's grasp of animal behavior that has become more common than not with dog trainers that have no business advising people on how to train a companion dog. It's on par with the silliness of hanging bells at a door to teach a dog to train us to let them out.

Trainers that believe a mother dog, wolf or ape etc in a real world setting would use a timeout as a means of teaching a lesson are forgetting that more often than not the mother would come back to a pile of blood, bones and bits of fur. It's not impossible that given enough time used in the companion dog setting context things might sink in. I'd suggest instead embracing a model closer to the reality in nature. Tell the

dog No!, in a way that's clear without being cruel. Work arounds like timeouts are for treat based training where the relationship works around actually becoming a teacher. Treat training is not a parent:child or teacher:student relationship. Its much closer to the addict:dealer relationship and has its limitations. Mother dogs instead use a more natural means of conveying incorrect behavior and move on with the business of life and so should all companion dog owners. You can read more about what constitutes real training in my booklet:

'What Are The Different (and Best) Companion Puppy and Dog Training Methods' - A Brief Pros and Cons Training Guide for Puppy & Dog Owners By John Wade

Where a time-out context might be completely legitimate for a companion dog owner is when the companion dog owner needs a timeout from the dog because they are about to lose their cool. Other than that I can't think of when a timeout would be useful.

What To Buy

Size Matters

From the perspective of tapping into the denning instinct and encouraging increased control of bowel and bladder during the house training period it's important to stick with a crate that is barely big enough to stand, lay and turn around. Don't anthropomorphize your dog. They aren't as impressed by the size of real estate as we are. They just want to feel safe and secure during their rest periods and for their species that means big enough to stand, lay and turn around.

You can buy a crate large enough for when your dog is an adult, just block the inside with milk crates or something else that accomplishes your goal.

Type

Early stages it doesn't matter all that much but if you ever plan on traveling with the dog it might. Airlines require certain levels of crates and the wire crates aren't allowed. If you think that might be the case have a look at the plastic crates. Not all of these are airline approved and some are far more sturdy than others.

Crates For Dogs That Are A Danger To Themselves Or Others

There are times when there simply is no other way to bridge the unsupervised gap for a dog with anxiety so severe that if not confined they will destroy a home, chew through doors or smash windows to escape the house itself. This can be triggered by separation but also due



to phobias related to thunder, fireworks, gun fire and other sounds that more often than not are from overhead.

While with professional help there may be help for even these dogs the dog owner has to keep the dog safely confined when no one is home or in a position to keep an eye on the dog while busy at home.

There can also be safety issues during the rehabilitation period for a dog with an aggression problem.

For the aforementioned dog problems a regular wire crate or plastic crate often will not suffice as a determined dog will find a way to escape. Dogs have been known to seriously injure themselves in their escape attempts.

There are crates on the market designed to serve the purpose. While they are not inexpensive they can be less of an investment than the costs associated with a destroyed couch or a law suit due to a dog bite.

What is important to remember is that crates used in these circumstances are at best partially solving the dog owner's problem and so the dog's problem still needs to be addressed.

In addition, with regard to the dogs suffering from separation anxiety they have been frequently known to, when escape isn't possible, to self-mutilate. Excessive licking at fore paws, flanks and tails are common.

For any of the above described dogs make sure you are working with a real professional. Before selecting that professional I'd highly recommend reading the booklet I wrote mentioned earlier.

Where To Put The Crate(s)

Everywhere you're going to be. In part, because the more rooms your dog spends time in the less likely he or she will soil in those rooms when the crate and baby gates are gone.

As mentioned it can backfire if you use a crate in a context where it is solely associated with separation. That doesn't just mean leaving a dog in a crate when you leave the house. It means when you're using the crate and you are home.

If we've worked together you know that I more often than not refer to crates as playpens because I firmly believe that for more than one reason a puppy or a dog needs to spend a lot of time in a crate when their owners are within sight. It is for this reason I highly recommend investing in several crates. There are tons of used crates available on Facebook Marketplace, Kijiji and Craigs list. If not listed, place an ad indicating you're looking for a few. You can sell all the extras for around the same price as you paid when you don't need them any longer.

The most dangerous dog I ever took on for rehabilitation required an investment in a crate for my kitchen, bedroom, office, family room and recroom in the basement. Using these crates every moment I was unable to guide the dog or keep myself safe was a huge contributor to the dogs eventual rehabilitation and rehoming. As mentioned above, a crate should never be used from the perspective of trying to wreck a puppy or dog's freedom. It is a temporary tool used to wreck the dog's freedom to make a mistake that will impact future freedoms.

As to the dog in questions, over a six month period because I put a stop to the dog being triggered when no one could teach the dog the error of his ways. All the while in my spare time teaching him alternatives when triggered. Eventually I taught him suck it up muscle exercises like Stay, Come and Heel - No Matter What and week by week for his future and my safety, he needed the crate less and less. I eventually found him a home and as far as I know he rarely needs to be crated for his or others safety.

Night Time Crating

Some people don't mind a dog sleeping in bed with them. Neither did I at one time but it seems that getting a good nights sleep is getting harder and harder and having one less thing in the bed a night for some might be a good thing to keep in mind. Either way, for the first couple of years I'd recommend against it. After that do what ever you please.

Instead, put a crate beside the bed right from the get go. It doesn't have to be a permanent thing but I will help transition a confused puppy a lot faster. Once the puppy has learned to settle you can move it to the end of the bed for a few days or weeks, later near the door, later in the hall, later at the foot of the stairs, later at the bottom of the stairs and so on until the crate is in it's ideal placement.

What Should Be In A Crate

Other than one item selected to maximize interest in chewing (nothing made of fabric - see my Brain Drain Toys Suggestions For Puppies PDF).

Why leave something in a crate when you won't always be able to supervise the dog something they may confuse with a household item. A dog's stuffed animal isn't different from a child's. Or a pillow for that matter. Leaving a big comfy mat/bed inside before a dog has been taught to make appropriate vs inappropriate chewing distinctions can make thing far harder than they need to be. If you're worried about comfort buy a piece of 1" foam insulation and cut it to fit under the crate or the crate tray (not inside). That will bounce the dog's body heat right back. If your dog's crate is sitting on concrete or concrete with carpet or hardwood directly above definitely do this. The concrete will absolutely suck the dog's body heat away and make it impossible to settle down.

When To Use The Crate With Puppies

Outside of a momentary placement here and there, the assumption for the recommendations below are:

- The puppy is healthy
- The puppy is on a bathroom schedule (See my puppy house training cheat sheet.)
- The puppy's daily routine includes a level of mental and physical stimulation in keeping with what would occur if it were still with its littermate and mother.
- Assuming the above, put the pup in a same room crate:
 - Every second of the day you can't get to the puppy before it can get to a window, a door, the garbage, the kids etc. In other words in the same context you might use a playpen with a toddler on a trying day. It won't be as much as you might think if you're using a leash directly proportional in length to how fast you happen to feel. It will also be less and less week after week.
- For every single nap
- Feeding time

Countering Time In The Crate When You're Outside The Home

Schedule one to five minutes in the crate with you right beside for every hour your puppy or dog must spend in the crate when you have outside the home commitments.

Leave the leash on the dog and thread it through the wires so you can use a leash tug to get the dogs attention enough to hear your disapproval. The rest of the time use your tone and body language to mark your appreciation for calmness. "Pup, that's the best 1/1000th of a second of silence I've ever seen. Aren't you a great dog!"

You may have to start with only one minute and build to five but usually because you're right there if anxiety rears its head you catch the dog in the manageable early stages (whining as opposed to barking, pawing at the door instead of gnawing at it etc.) and can encourage them to knock it off so the anxiety genie doesn't get out of the bottle. This will help them develop the ability to do it on their own when your'e not there.

This is also a great way to incrementally increase a dog's ability to cope with stress in general. Left to their own devices anxiety day by day increases bit by bit until it one day it hits a feverish pitch and has becomes a habit that no longer requires build up. Instead the dog simply goes from zero to sixty the moment the door closes. A common sign that this mistake has been made is crate soiling. Not because the dog lacks house training but as an anxiety response.

Additional Tips and Tricks

Doors

If you're introducing a crate to a dog, particularly a skittish dog be careful of those darn doors. They sometimes swing shut on their hind quarters when you're putting them in and it sure doesn't make it easier then next time.

Go To Bed & Come Out

Don't just teach your dog to go to the crate. Teach you dog that the door doesn't open until the dog settles and not to step out until you say the word "Come".

Turn It Into A Game

Or at least try to. Rather than only putting your dog in the crate when you have to, send your dog in and out of the crate as many times a day as is possible. Just a quick in and then out, three time in a row and give it a break. Do it with lots of upbeat tone and body language where your

Marrow Bone

1. Take a few days to gradually acclimatize your dog's gut to an actual butcher store marrow bone.
2. Five minutes before you have no choice but to leave the pup in the crate while you are going to be outside the home give the dog the marrow bone outside of the crate and set your phone for 2.5 minutes and take the bone away placing it in sight but out of reach. Two in half

minutes later send your dog to the crate and return the marrow bone. When you get home put the bone back in the refrigerator.

Use a handheld digital recorder or your computer to record vocalization or better yet if feasible video so you can see what's actually going on.

Meals

Consider feeding your dog in the crate.

Treats

Toss a tiny bit of a treat near the crate, nearer the crate, slightly inside the crate and eventually deeper and deeper into the crate.

Toys

If your dog is toy oriented do as above with the treats.

Doggy Day Care

If your dog needs a crate but has a negative history around them that's going to take some time to unwind consider investing in day care and work hard when you are at home at acclimatizing your dog to a crate until you don't need the daycare.

The Fearful Of Crates/High Anxiety Dog

If you're introducing a crate to a dog that for likely the reasons mentioned earlier, has crate triggered anxiety you may have your work cut out for you.

The following symptoms are signs of serious crate anxiety:

- Non stop whining and barking when left alone.
- Emptying of the bladder and bowels
- A marrow bone or other highly valued food item, normally readily chewed or eaten, is left untouched in the crate until the owner returns and releases the dog.
- Dog has been licking or chewing at paws, flank or tail
- Crate is damp, not from urine, but from excessive salivation
- Crate position has moved due to dog bouncing off its walls.
- Bedding is shredded.

Outside of the crate these dogs often also exhibit the following behaviors:

- Abnormally clingy
- Phobic with regard to sounds, typically overhead such as thunder, fireworks etc.
- Very attentive and very good with regard to obedience exercises.

There are so many advantages to having a crate in a dog's life both from the perspective of the dog and the dog owner that it's worth giving it a shot to help the dog enjoy time in a crate from a sanctuary perspective. However, for a variety of reasons, some simply practical rather than founded in whether it's technically feasible to help the dog with regard to crates and anxiety in general.

Here are a few things to keep in mind with regard to anxiety, particularly separation anxiety in general.

- Imagine the worst day of your life and that is a reasonable approximation of how the dog feels every time it is left behind.
- Severe anxiety is an incredibly serious condition that left unaddressed almost always increases in severity.
- The dog's anxiety is not crate anxiety per se, it's separation anxiety, triggered by time in a crate when separated from social connections. Eventually though, any time in the crate will trigger severe anxiety.
- Because the problem isn't actually crate-centric but is actually an anxiety problem all efforts to crate train in the traditional sense should cease and the focus should be redirected to addressing the dog's anxiety.
- Depending on the origins of the behavior some cases will never be "fixed". However, a significant portion of the symptoms can be reduced. This may or may not include finding comfort from a crate.

- It is a condition that is entirely preventable but due to widespread shortcomings in the breeding, training and veterinarian community with regard to authentic, science based research with regard to critical socialization periods and approaches to companion dog training it continues to take a terrible toll on the lives of dogs and dog owners.

The following is not intended to replace my advise from a moment ago with regard to redirecting your focus from crate training to addressing the anxiety. It's to give you a sense of some of the things that may be involved in the treatment of the anxiety that may hopefully also lead to crate comfort.

Tips For Desensitizing The Seriously Crate Averse Dog

Step One

The first step is to stop all crate training. Here are some short-term alternatives that perhaps will suffice well enough that there will be no need to continue with crate training. However, crates can come in so handy down the road concerning the following that it may be worth making an effort.

- Continuity for a dog from home to the cottage/hotel/camping/moving
- When an injury requires crate rest as part of recovery
- The dog's or other's safety in the home.
- Transport in planes, trains and automobiles.
- While at groomers or veterinarians.

Step Two

All associations with the crate must be separated from any separation from their owners.

Step Three

Behavior modification with regard to relationship dependency, confidence building, must begin immediately. For example:

- Address relationship dependency
 - Teach 'Stay' on a mat that will fit inside the crate eventually to be used, in a context where the dog incrementally comes to understand it is not to move until it hears the word 'Come' in the manner I describe in my sessions and books. Do not use treats other than as a distraction. Not a reward.
 - Use the 'Stay' as a means to gradually increase the distance between the owner and the dog in the same room and eventually out of sight.

Step Four

Choose the correct crate for this sort of dog. I prefer the plastic models. These have three pieces, a top, a bottom, and a door. You would first forget about introducing the crate until you can get the dog to 'Stay' on the mat, as described briefly above.

Once that's well established you would disassemble the crate and just use the bottom which is very basket-like and line the bottom portion of the crate with the familiar mat and send the dog to the mat/crate bottom for initially just a few seconds and then release the dog with the word 'Come.'

Put the dog right back and repeat for no more and no less than three repetitions. After the dog has had a break do it again, and again and again. Repeat this exercise as many times as you can fit in during the day. When you think it's time you can extend the length of the time on the mat/crate bottom, do so but in easy to digest increments.

Once there are no issues with going to the mat/crate bottom, put the lid in the vicinity to desensitize the dog to its appearance and proximity.

Eventually fasten it on securely and keep up with the go to the mat

Next step is getting the dog used to the clattering of the door (unattached), eventually attached, eventually briefly closed and incrementally increasing the time the door is closed. Always with their owner there, still with the leash on threaded through the door or ventilation ports on the side and NEVER, EVER, EVER left alone. The purpose of the leash is so that the owner can interrupt the slightest indication that the dog is thinking about its past feelings and redirect the dog back to the owner.

Some dogs are fine with short steps others it can take months to replace the fear with comfort.

Medications

This a touchy subject for many people. Whereas giving a dog medication prescribed to resolve a urinary tract infection is embraced by most without a blink of an eye, many balks when it comes to accepting that their dog might benefit from a medication designed to address a mental health issue.

- I will say this about behavior modification medication:
- It is hugely overprescribed.
- It is rarely correctly prescribed.

- It rarely has anywhere near the impact promised for the vast majority of dogs.
- In spite of assurances from the pharmaceutical companies and veterinarians, it can take 3 months to notice any impact and then it may only be enough to suggest that a change in strength or augmentation may be in order.
- When one doesn't work, another might.

That said if you can find the correct dog trainer and veterinarian to work with it may help, and the condition is so severe and impactful on the lifestyle and quality of life of both the dog and the dog owner that I would hate to have anyone throw away a potential avenue of relief.

The ideal is that it is a temporary tool. The intent is not to sedate. These are medications where the purpose is to open up a window of opportunity for the dog to quieten what Buddhists refer to in humans as the chattering of 'Monkey Mind.' In some cases, this is what happens, and then the efforts of the dog owner to teach their dog to exert self-control have a higher chance of finding a foothold. In time, once the dog has learned these skills the medication can be slowly withdrawn.

Timelines for people can be as much as 12 weeks. This was initially the same for dogs, but in the years since it became heavily prescribed, they have shortened the timeline considerably. Not, I think because it takes less time but because it markets better. But, I'm a skeptical man. So who knows. In any case, if there aren't any severe side-effects, try and hang in for 12 weeks in your assessment of its impact.

Keep in mind as well that in the average veterinary practice there is a shallow level of understanding of both the problem the medication is intended to help with and the medications as well. More often than not these medications are prescribed and monitored incorrectly (if at all), and much is left to chance. I've yet to see a veterinarian ask the correct questions to establish a baseline so they can more accurately determine whether incremental progress is occurring, or whether a change in dosage might be required, or augmented with another medication or replaced with another entirely. So, do some research before you go into your veterinarian's.

Overall, I have had far more success without medications than with them, but as I say, it's a severe condition, and personally, I'd rather have to live with urinary tract infection than severe anxiety so I would keep medication on the table.

Alternatives to Typical Crates for the Crate Fearing Dog

Carpet Protectors

As mentioned earlier, there are crates that a dog can not break out of and thereby risk physically endangering themselves in the process but that would only solve one aspect of the problem. The bigger issue here is, of course, is the dog's anxiety and what happens throughout the rest

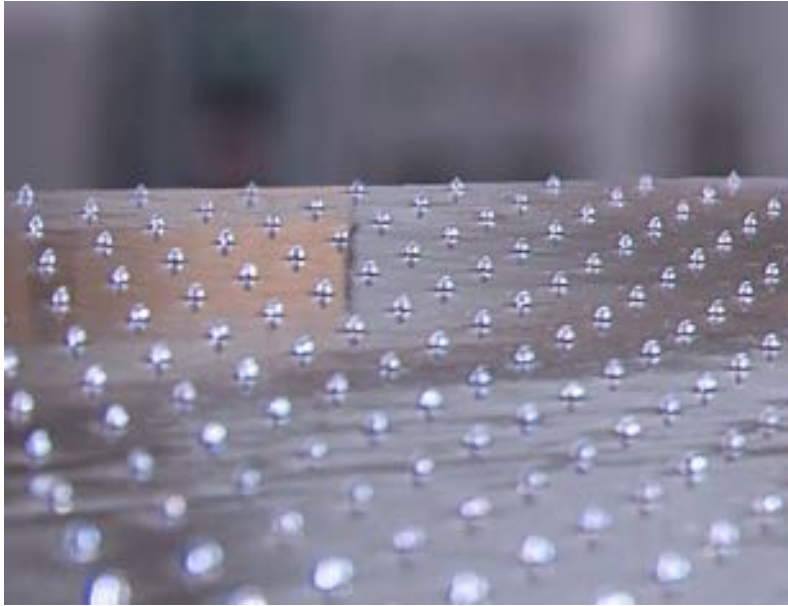


of the house when the dog is not in the crate and cannot be supervised.

In some cases, I've had success replacing the crate with an alternate albeit less foolproof (than the escape-proof crates) containment approach.

You are likely familiar with the stiff plastic sheets used to protect rugs from office chairs.

The underside of these is somewhat prickly. You have to shop around. Some are too thorn like and might puncture the foot pads of a larger dog and others are too stubby to act as a deterrent. Last time I was at a Costco, they had the perfect version, but I suspect that might be regional and subject to change.



The idea is to flip them over and place them strategically so the dog cannot step or jump over them. Cut them up if need be but you'll need something better than kitchen scissors.

It's better to initially set them up in an area while you're home so the dog

can learn with your partial guidance. You want to introduce the pokey-mat to the dog as opposed to the dog running blindly into a room and accidentally stepping on the deterrent. Don't make a fuss just put it in the kitchen and family room when you'll both be there and put it in an area the dog might step or somewhere in the family room. Let it happen organically as opposed to forcing the issue. Put a toy, treat or their food nearby and if they approach use your voice and body language to warn them but other than that let them make their own mistakes.

Hot Sauce

When you're introducing the spikes the first few times, before the dog comes into the room you can put a few drops of hot sauce on the edges in hopes they give it a lick. Not that painfully crazy stuff that's available, just something that is definitely going to be a "Yuck!". If your dog does, in fact, go, "Yuck!", as opposed to "Yum!", then dilute the bottle with water into a spray bottle and spray the mat so the next time the dog approaches their nose can warn them off before they have to

step on the mat. This way you have them avoiding areas where the mat is as opposed to space itself which may happen if you spray-misted the area as opposed to the mat, as there are likely going to be times when you have no problem with the dog being in an area.

When it appears the dog has the idea, then you can try using the mat as a barrier to the areas you want to restrict the dog when you're not home. If it works, try it when you're not home. If it doesn't work at all, be sure to keep your receipt so you can return them. Sometimes you can find them on Kijiji or post it on one of the local buy/sell/trade local Facebook sites.

Two-Way Tape and Cardboard

An alternative to the above is to cut up pieces of cardboard the dog is unlikely going to be able to jump over and cover with two-way tape (carpet tape). Again, rather than let your dog learn the hard way introduce similarly to what's described just above. Hot sauce strategy as well.

Invisible Crate

Another approach is with an indoor version of the invisible fence containment systems used out doors. <https://store.petsafe.net/indoor-radio-fence>

V2

That's all for now, I'll add to this PDF from time to time as I think of other things that may help.

Regards,

John 'Ask The Dog Guy' Wade

Embracing Science and Common Sense

London's #1, Most Experienced and Most Referred To Puppy and Dog Trainer