Training Your Dog to Use a Crate – taken from Best Friends Magazine – September/October 2013

**Dogs are Hard-Wired by their Genetic History to be Den Animals**

A den is a small, well-defined space where dogs feel safe. It is also a place that they instinctively avoid soiling. The combination of these two traits make crate training, done in the right way, a kind and effective component in housetraining your new puppy or dog.

To use the crate as an aid in housetraining, set up a routine. For example, you can feed the puppy in the crate and, afterwards, carry him or walk him on leash straight out to an elimination site where you can use a word or phrase to remind the dog what the trip outside is for.

There are other benefits of crate training. A crate can be a place for your dog to rest or have “down time.” If you’ve just acquired a dog, a crate can limit access to the entire house until he or she knows the house rules. And, at some point in your dog’s life, it may be necessary to use a crate when you are traveling with your pet or when your dog is recuperating from an injury. Such potentially traumatic situations will be much less stressful if your dog is already comfortable in a crate.

**How to Introduce a Crate**

To ensure that your dog only associates good things with the crate, start by putting treats and/or toys in the crate and encouraging him to go in. If your dog is afraid to go in, place a treat in the crate as far as he is willing to go. After he takes the treat, place another treat a little further back in the crate. Keep going until he is eating treats at the very back, then feed him his next meal in the crate with the door open, so that he can walk in and out at will.

Crate training a fearful dog can take days, so be patient and encouraging. If a crate is properly introduced and used, your dog will happily enter and settle down.

**Using a Crate at Night**

Many people crate their dogs during the night. Put the dog in with a treat and a cue, such as “kennel,” delivered in a cheery tone of voice. The crate should be situated close to you so that you can hear the dog whine or whimper if he needs to eliminate during the night. If you are training a puppy, be prepared for one or two trips outside at night to eliminate. If the puppy goes outside and doesn’t “produce,” don’t allow any extra time for play or long drinks of water when you come back inside. Instead, encourage the pup to return to the crate. He may whine a bit, but if you have given him ample opportunity to eliminate, try to ignore the protest and he should settle down.

**Length of Time in the Crate**

No dog, young or old, should be living in a crate most of the time. All dogs need daily exercise and interaction with others. Even four hours in a crate without a break during the day is a long time for many adult dogs, so we don’t recommend crating your dog if you’re gone all day. Except for nighttime, routinely crating a dog for long periods of time is not acceptable.

Puppies should not be left in a crate for more than two hours. Forcing a puppy to break his instinctive aversion to soiling his sleeping area can lead to serious housetraining difficulties. Also, since they are still developing, puppies have even more need for social interaction than adult dogs.

Most adult dogs can stay in a crate for the entire night without a trip outside. However, young puppies and some old dogs cannot physically hold their bladders and bowels through the night.

**When Not to use a Crate**

A crate should not be used as a form of punishment. As mentioned above, your dog should only have warm, fuzzy feelings about his crate. In addition, even though a dog can come to see his crate as a safe place, it is not the solution for a dog with separation anxiety, since he could injure himself tying to get out.

**WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN BUYING A CRATE**

Most pet-supply stores sell dog crates. When choosing a crate, make sure it’s big enough so that the dog can stand up, turn around, and lie flat on his side in comfort, but not so spacious that he can sleep and eat at one end and eliminate at the other. If you are training a growing puppy, you can buy a larger crate with a divider for adjusting the crate size as he grows.

**Website Resource for Dog Owners:**

For tips on picking the right dog, introducing your dog to your home, information on training, behavioral issues, how to pick a dog walker, groomer, pet sitter, boarding facility, or trainer, and lots of other information, go to: <http://yourdogsfriend.org>. (The organization is based in the DC area so they also have a list of dog service providers for that area.)