

WHY USE A DOG CRATE

IS IT CRUEL TO LOCK MY DOG IN A CRATE OR CAGE?

Many people think this is true, as they would certainly not want to be locked in a crate (note that dog crate and dog cage are the same thing) for any length of time themselves. Well, this is not the case for dogs who are 'den' animals. Just look at where they want to spend most of their sleep and relaxation time - under the table, tucked in the corner of a room. In the wild, wolves and wild dogs are known to burrow holes to sleep in.

Hopefully you are getting the picture, basically dogs like to feel safe and secure when sleeping and have somewhere they can be alone. A dog crate is able to provide this safe haven.

WHY USE A DOG CRATE / CAGE ANYWAY?

A crate helps address many of the problems that cause stress and anxiety to pet owners. They serve a useful purpose to prevent (and rectify) problems associated with destructive behaviour and fear of strangers or other types of people. They help with house training, with visitors who are afraid of dogs and of course when travelling with your dog.

WHERE SHOULD I PUT THE DOG CRATE?

The best places for a crate or cage are in the corner of rooms, away from too much heat and cold drafts. Dogs like to be near their pack (which is you), so locate the crate where your dog can see and hear you. It's a good idea for the crate to be your dog's only bed.

WHAT DO I LOOK FOR IN A DOG CRATE / CAGE?

A dog crate is usually a rectangular enclosure constructed of wire, plastic, canvas or even wood. Some people prefer to start out with a wire crate as these are less prone to being chewed in the early days of crate training.

- **Size:** Whichever type of dog crate / cage you get, they should be large enough to allow your dog to stretch out flat on his side without being cramped and to sit up without hitting their head on the top. Also remember that a dog crate that is too large defeats the purpose of providing security and promoting bowel control.
- **Materials:** Avoid cheap thin wire crates they are not worth it! They are more prone to collapsing accidents and dogs can easily chew the wires together making for an unsightly crate.
- **Dividers:** If you are purchasing a crate that is large enough for your dog when fully grown block off part of it initially, so that your dog feels snug and secure. Adjustable crate dividers are perfect for this.
- **Cover:** It is also a good idea to have a cover to darken the inside of the dog crate, this helps to settle your dog and make it less likely for him to be disturbed by distraction outside. Covers can either be a blanket or better still vinyl covers that are easy to keep clean and are not a haven for fleas. Whichever you choose, make sure your dog's crate has plenty of ventilation and is not in direct sunlight

- **Bedding:** We always recommend that the bed covers the entire dog crate (i.e. do not leave an area for soiling). This helps build bowel control as your puppy will not want to soil his or her bed. You will have accidents though, so it is a good idea to have a couple of machine washable beds on hand.
- **Water:** Your dog should always have access to water, so we think a good quality clip on crate bowl is essential.

HOW DO I ACCLIMATISE MY DOG TO THE CRATE / CAGE?

It is best to start crate training when your dog is still a puppy. You can't lock your dog in a crate and just expect the whole concept to work - it won't. You will need time and patience to introduce the crate to successfully ensure your dog sees it as its home and special place. Here are a few guidelines:

Start by leaving the crate door open, and place all your dog's toys just inside the door. Hence if they want a toy they will have to climb into the crate a bit and retrieve it. You can also use special treats as a further encouragement to enter the crate. Day by day, move the toys or treats further back. It will only take a day or two before your dog starts to go into the crate to lie down.

After a few days of napping and sleeping in the open crate, quietly close the door (preferably while your dog is asleep) and leave it closed for a few minutes or until they wake up. Once awake, open the door, praise them and release them from the crate.

Gradually build up the amount of time the crate door is kept closed. Eventually, you will be able to stay in the room, with the door closed, and your dog will lie there quietly until they fall asleep.

Once this is comfortable for your dog, leave the house, and then return immediately. Move on to leaving your dog for longer and longer periods of time (3 minutes, 5 minutes, 7 minutes, 1/2 an hour, and so on), until you do not hear any barking or crying at any point.

Continue increasing the time and work on trying to get a fixed routine of leaving the house (i.e. picking up your keys, putting your coat on etc)

Put your dog in its crate at regular intervals during the day up to a maximum of 2 hours.

Don't crate only when you are leaving the house. Place the dog in the crate while you are home as well. Use it as a "safe" zone (thus keeping your sanity).

By crating when you are home AND while you are gone, your dog becomes comfortable in the crate and not worried that you will not return, or that you are leaving him/her alone. This helps to prevent separation anxiety later in life.

Give your dog a chew toy for distraction and be sure to remove collar and tags, which could become caught in an opening.

Make it very clear to children that the crate is NOT a playhouse for them, but a "special room" for the dog,

Although the crate is your dog's haven and safe place, it must not be off-limits to humans. Acclimatise your dog from the outset to letting you reach inside at anytime.

Do not let the dog out of the crate while they are barking or they will think that barking is the key to opening the door to the crate. Wait until the barking or whining has stopped for at least 10 seconds before letting them out.

Finally, but most importantly: NEVER USE THE CRATE AS A PUNISHMENT AND NEVER DISCIPLINE YOUR DOG WHILE HE IS IN THE CRATE.