Teaching your dog to love his crate can be an invaluable tool. Dogs learn to love their crate as their very own special place/den. It becomes a familiar and secure place, whether in the car, at a motel or a dog show, visiting, or just at home.

Personally I recommend teaching your dog about the crate the day he comes home, this will ensure that he grows up loving his crate.

Now let me set some ground rules before I get into teaching the crate.

Rule number 1: (and this may be the most important) The crate should **never**be a punishment, Never force him into the crate against his will.

Rule number 2: Make sure the crate is the right size for your dog. Crates should be large enough for the adult dog to stand, sit and stretch out. (Ideally for a puppy, you start with a smaller crate, or block off one end, so he can't use one end for sleeping and the other for toileting. A key principle is to teach you don't mess where you sleep and eat.)

Rule number 3: The crate will become his safe space, so make sure it can accommodate this. Set the crate up somewhere, where it is nice and quiet and usually dark, and give him lots of familiar blankets.



Flex being the puppy, Crate has sheet draped over the top, water bowl and toy – which Flex is demonstrating how to useCrate water bowl

Teaching your Puppy the Crate

Before you bring your puppy home, I would have a crate ready, set up in the lounge (and one in the car to bring him home if I didn’t have my permanent car crates) this ready crate would have a sack mat – one that I didn’t mind getting destroyed. A crate water bowl – one that hangs from the side of the crate, so the puppy doesn’t spill it on himself and his bedding. But if you don’t have one of these an ice cream container will do, something with a nice wide base so it is less likely that the dog will pull it over. I would also have a couple of toys for the pup to chew on. Now, draped over the top of the crate I would have an old sheet – the sheet is to help with the den feel, every night make sure you put the flap of the sheet down so he can’t see you, and he is most likely to settle.

When I teach my dogs the crate, they sleep in it and they eat in it, right from pup. So when you bring your pup home, that first night, Put him in the crate and cover with the sheet, Place the crate in an area so he is with you, and part of family activities, even as an observer. Do not put him in the basement. Place the crate in the kitchen or family room—if possible move it around with you. If possible, at night the crate should go in your bedroom. Not only does this provide comfort to the puppy, but your own sleeping patterns will encourage the pup to slumber on and form instinct. If there is any fussing, you're there to deal with it.

He will eventually fall asleep. When he wakes up (you should be able to hear little pitter patters, or whining) if he’s whining wait till he has stopped, then let him out and take him straight outside to the cold grass, and the cold grass under his paws should make him want to go toilet. This will be the start of your toilet training. I also feed my dogs in their crates so they know exactly where the food comes from; it **NEVER** comes from the kitchen or from a human’s plate. So therefore the dog should not expect food from the plate (begging behaviour), because that just doesn’t work. So feed your puppy in his crate, he will generally want to go to sleep after eating and then toilet when he wakes up.  During the day (when you are home) – I would leave the door of the crate open, so that he can come and go as he pleases, he will most likely sleep or just be in there on his own accord.

If you are teaching your puppy to love the crate there are a few things to remember; he will most probably cry when he realises that you have left him in the crate, don’t go rushing to let him out, he will settle. If you let him out when he cries, you are teaching him that he cries to be let out, and if you let him out only sometimes when he cries, you will have an even bigger problem on your hands as he will try again and again until that magical time when you let him out, because in his mind – its only a matter of time before you let in.

Teaching your dog to love the crate

When teaching your fully grown dog the crate, set it up the same as you would for a puppy. A familiar mat and an old sheet to drape over the top, there’s no real need to keep toys or a water bowl in there, you can but probably won’t affect them either way.

When teaching a fully grown dog the crate I always set it up in a familiar setting. I.e. the lounge and I always make sure that the dog is out of the room when I am assembling the crate – it can be quite noisy especially if you have a wire crate. Why would you want to get**into** something that makes very scary noises?

Let your dog back into the room and sit down beside the crate, giving no cue that you want the dog to go inside it, he will acknowledge it and give it a sniff. You can clicker train this, click for interaction with the crate, then one foot inside, two feet inside and so on. And/or you can wait till feeding time, where to start with you will place the bowl just side the crate, so that he needs to put his head in to get his food (remember that we are pairing a good thing (food) with a new/uncertain thing) as he gets more confident over several meals with eating with his head in the crate then move the bowl back further till he needs to put at least a paw inside the crate, and continue that process till he is confident with being completely inside the crate. Once this step is overcome, then start gently moving the door while your dog is eating, don’t trap him in there at this stage, you will probably freak him out. Once he’s ok with that, start playing with the latch, when he is ok with that, then start feeding him then closing the door behind him briefly (but opening it before he is finished) build this up, then work on duration. Until your dog is happy with the crate then I would recommend using the crate to feed your dog every meal time. This could take a couple of months, but it will be worth it. During the day, leave the crate door open so that the dog can go in there of his own accord.

Situations where the crate is very handy

Teaching your puppy or dog self-control – with crate games

House breaking the puppy

Car etiquette

A safe space