

[Crates](#) make particularly good tools for two important training tasks:

- Crates make [housetraining](#) simple. Because dogs don't like to pee or poop where they sleep and eat, they'll hold it when they're in their crate. Pop your dog in his crate whenever you're not with him, and he won't have any accidents in the house--this prevents a bad habit from forming. Take him out for bathroom breaks regularly, and he's more likely to eliminate outdoors--this helps him learn a good habit.
- Crates help prevent boredom and [separation anxiety](#). If you stock his crate with [toys](#), especially chew toys stuffed with kibble and a few treats, he'll learn two more good habits: chewing on his toys rather than your favorite shoes, and settling down to entertain himself when you're not around.

Some people worry that crate confinement is cruel, but if you do it right, your dog won't see it that way at all. His crate can be a cozy den where he retreats from household chaos or just relaxes. And once he's housetrained, your dog will have the run of the house as well as a nice little den of his own--just leave the door open for him.

How to choose a crate

If your dog's crate is too big, he may feel that he can eliminate at one end and still keep his living area clean. If it's too small, he'll be cramped. The ideal size is just big enough for your dog to stand up, turn around, and lie down in comfortably, and just long enough so that his nose and rear end don't touch each end of the crate.

If you've got a [puppy](#) but don't want to buy new crates as he grows, you can block off part of an adult-sized crate to keep him in one side of it. Some crates come with dividers just for this purpose.

Most crates are made of either collapsible wire or solid plastic, each of which has its pros and cons. Wire crates let your dog keep an eye on what's going on around him--good for a dog who's prone to feeling lonely--and they're usually cheaper. Solid plastic crates can do double duty on [plane](#) or car trips, and they have a more den-like atmosphere, which an easily overstimulated dog may prefer. However, you can make a wire crate cozier by draping a blanket over the top and sides, leaving the door uncovered.

How to make the crate feel like home

Lining the crate with bedding makes it cozier, but some dogs may see

the bedding as toilet or chewing material. If that happens, remove the bedding for a while. Never line the crate with shredded newspaper--it's too tempting for your dog to use it as a toilet.

Bumper pads for the sides, like those you'd use for a baby's crib, can make the crate more comfortable and prevent trapped paws, tooth damage (from gnawing on metal), snagged [collars](#), and other injuries. A hot water bottle wrapped in a towel at night can comfort a new puppy, replacing the warmth of sleeping with littermates.

Finally, if the crate slides around on the floor, put a towel underneath it to give it more grip.

Put the crate somewhere that gets a lot of foot traffic--perhaps the kitchen or family room--to keep your dog from feeling isolated and to get him used to the noise and bustle of your household. You can also get a portable crate that you take with you as you move around the house.

How to get your dog used to the crate

If you've got a puppy: It's fairly easy to teach a puppy that the crate is a happy place. Usually all it takes is stuffing a chew toy with kibble and a few treats, letting your pup sniff it, and putting it in the crate--your puppy will most likely follow. Or put a few snacks just outside the door, then just inside, then all the way in the back of the crate, and your pup will follow the treat trail right in.

If you've got an adult dog: [Adult dogs](#) who've never been crate trained need more time and effort to get used to their new den.

- As soon as you bring your dog home, feed him all his meals inside the crate. If he won't go all the way in, put the bowl just inside, so he'll at least poke his head in. At the next meal, you can put the bowl a little further inside the crate; the next meal even further, and so on. In addition, give your dog chew toys and chew bones only when he's in his crate.
- Practice going in and out of the crate. Tell your dog in a cheerful tone of voice, "Go to your crate," and toss a treat inside. Leave the door open and let him fetch the treat. Do this a few times, and once he's happily going in and out, close the door with him inside for a minute or two. As long as he's resting inside calmly, praise him and offer an occasional treat.
- Gradually lengthen the amount of time your dog spends in the crate with the door closed, but stay in the room. Then begin to

leave the room for short periods, which you can slowly stretch out. This process can take several days--go slowly and proceed to the next step only if your dog seems happy being in the crate.

Important: To keep your dog feeling positive about spending time in his crate, don't ever put him in it as a punishment, and give him plenty of breaks for bathroom trips, walks, and time to play and bond with you. The crate is a training tool, not a place to stick your dog and forget about him; if a dog is spending your entire workday in his crate, and sleeping there at night, he's spending too much time confined to a small space.

What to do if your dog whines and cries

It's common for dogs to put up some protest when they're getting used to the crate. Usually they just want out, in which case you should ignore them--otherwise you're teaching your dog that whining will get him what he wants. Wait until your dog quiets down before letting him out, and then try again later with a shorter period of confinement.

However, it's also possible that your dog needs a bathroom break. If you suspect that's the case, take him outside but make it all business: no playing or romping. If he doesn't eliminate within a minute or two, he goes back inside.

A dog who truly panics inside the crate could hurt himself in his attempts to get out, in which case the crate is not serving its purpose as a place where your dog can feel--and be--safe and secure. Explore other methods of housetraining, and consider whether this dog simply doesn't need a crate to be reliable alone inside the house.

Bottom line: Crate training is the easiest way to housetrain dogs, and it also teaches them how to settle down and entertain themselves when you're gone. However, crates won't work if they're used to punish a dog or keep him "out of sight, out of mind." Use the crate only when necessary, give your dog plenty of breaks to stretch his legs and to play and bond with you, and make crate time more pleasant by stocking it with toys.