

Crate Training, House Breaking and Potty Training

By Lyn Richards

In crate training, please remember that repetition is necessary. Your puppy will not understand what you want unless you repeatedly show him/her the desired behavior MANY times.

Keep in mind also that your puppy does not know what is expected and must be shown the proper place to eliminate and when.

Your best potty training friend is your crate. When you cannot watch your puppy, use a crate. Think of the crate the same way that you think of a playpen for a human child. Even if you are only leaving the room for a "minute", either take the puppy with you or use the crate. After all, you would not leave a toddler in the house alone "for just a minute" would you?

Crate training can be fun for the puppy if you make it a POSITIVE experience. The DEN is an integral part of the wild dog's upbringing and safety zone. The same thing applies to the "crate". Giving the pup special "treats" is a great way to introduce him to his crate. The only time the puppy receives these special treats is when he is in the crate; the treats become associated with the crate.

Use the crate wisely. Don't crate only when you are leaving the house. Place the puppy in the crate while you are in the home as well. Use it as a "safe" zone, or for "time outs". (Thus keeping your sanity!)

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

Most puppies will not soil their "den". The first couple of tries you might have some accidents, but don't be discouraged. An easy way to avoid accidents in the night for the first few weeks is by following this routine:

1. Set your alarm for about 3 hours after your normal bedtime. When the alarm goes off, get up immediately, go to the crate and CARRY the pup outside. Place him on the ground and encourage him to eliminate. PRAISE when he does, and bring him back to the crate. Go back to bed.
2. Set your alarm for another 3 hours and get back to sleep. When the alarm goes off again, repeat step one.
3. After about a week of the above routine, IF it has been successful (no crate messing), then you can set your alarm for halfway through your sleep time. Follow the remainder of step one. When you arise in the morning, TAKE the pup outside before you do anything else. Feed the pup and then crate. Follow your regular waking routine, then walk the pup one more time before going off to work.
4. Repeat the feeding, walking and crating at lunchtime. Pups from the ages of 2 to 4 months CANNOT control their elimination for much more than 4 hours, so if you cannot return home at lunch time, arrange for someone to do this for you at lunch.

If the crate is too large, the pup can easily soil on one side and sleep on the other. The way to prevent this is to buy a crate that will accommodate your pet when it is fully grown. Then, get a box that will fit inside the back of the crate. The box should be large enough that there is only room for the puppy to stand and lie down comfortably.

As the puppy grows, provide more room by putting in a smaller box, or cutting down the size. When the puppy reliably asks to be put outside to eliminate, remove the box so the puppy can use the whole crate.

If the puppy messes the crate, replace the box size to the point at which the puppy was reliable, and just give the pup a little more time to learn. In conjunction with the crate training, potty training starts immediately.

Whenever you remove the puppy from the crate or just want the puppy to "go potty", take the dog to the door that will always be used to "go outside". Use the SAME door throughout the training period.

On the handle of this door, tie a bell to a string, dropping it even with the height of the puppy's nose. When you bring the puppy to the door, lure the puppy to touch the bell with either its nose or paw, (using a treat) causing the bell to ring.

After the puppy rings the bell, give it the treat (use a SMALL piece of meat or dried liver) and say "OUTSIDE" in a happy tone of voice. Take the puppy outside on the leash.

Reminder: during the housebreaking DO NOT allow the pup outside to eliminate alone or loose in the yard. Yes, that means that in the rain, snow, whatever: YOU GO OUTSIDE ALSO. Give the puppy plenty of time. Don't rush or you will be sorry. When the puppy urinates or defecates, praise the puppy with "GOOD OUTSIDE" and again, give the puppy a tiny, tiny treat.

Continue to wait. When the puppy poops, again praise the puppy with "GOOD OUTSIDE" and give a treat. Go back inside, stop at the door again, and treat once again. If the puppy does not "potty" even after staying outside 15 minutes, return back inside, place the puppy back into the crate, wait 15 minutes and start again from the beginning.

If done religiously, this training process should take only about 2 weeks for the puppy to understand. This method will work with any dog, regardless of age. If you adopt a dog from a shelter or rescue program, follow the same routine. Remember, even though the dog is older or even an adult, he still does not know the rules of your home, and may not have ever BEEN in a house. Be PATIENT and this method WILL work.

Take is slow and easy . . . be PATIENT . . and have FUN with your dog!