



Sue's Views for Happy Pets!

To Crate, or Not To Crate

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I'm often asked what I think of dog crates.

I often wish crates were made to resemble a little house. If a dog crate were made to look like a house, it would be easier for people to see a crate for what it isn't . . . a cage. If used properly and responsibly, a crate can be quite a valuable tool in enhancing your relationship with your dog.

In primitive times, before dogs were domesticated, they slept in dens (they would dig a shallow hole in the ground in a place that was safe from predators). The den had just enough room to allow a dog to turn around, as well as to comfortably lie down.

Although dogs have now been domesticated for millennia, they still maintain some of their most primitive instincts; one of which is the desire to "den", which means having a small, safety zone where they can feel secure and safe.

A dog crate is simply an indoor dog house. Just as you and I have a bedroom, in a healthy crating environment your dog would view his crate as his bedroom/comfort zone as well.

In addition to providing a cozy bedroom for your dog, a crate is also a useful training tool. Crating makes housebreaking easier and destructive chewing is also more easily kept at bay when there is a crate involved. Also, if your lifestyle involves traveling with your dog, traveling is much less stressful and becomes safer for you both when your dog is crated while in transit. Many hotels and even some landlords tend to be more receptive to guests/tenants who have a crate-trained dog.

What I've found is that the Humane Society of the United States says basically that crating

is a great training tool, if used in moderation.

Once a dog is 6 months old or thereabouts, and as long as he is no longer having "accidents" in the house or demonstrating typical puppy chewing behaviors, he doesn't need to be confined to a crate unless you're going to be away from home for more than a few hours.

The crate should be kept in the room where you congregate most as a family, not somewhere by itself where your dog will become depressed, feel rejected and lonesome, and lack socialization and interaction with people. Remember, dogs are social animals. They don't like being alone, and shouldn't be sitting by themselves in a separate part of the house if you're home.

If a dog is crated in a room that's not where you are, he will soon dislike the crate and see it as a punishment rather than the comfortable, safe place that it's meant to be.

Keep the door open so your dog can take a toy or a treat in and enjoy his "safe place", leaving the option open to your dog so he can choose to go into his crate while you're home with him. When he does that and obviously likes his crate, you know you have developed a positive crating routine.

If your dog is apprehensive to go into his crate and needs to be coaxed or "tricked" into going into his crate, he's probably being crated too much.

In a healthy, positive crating experience your dog enjoys being in his crate and sees it as his "personal space", not as a "punishment".

In summary ---

A crate is only to be used as a training tool, it's not your dog's "residence".

Adult dogs (over age 6 months) don't need to be crated nearly as much as puppies do.

The key word for the most positive and pleasant crating experience is moderation.