

Introducing a Dog to Crating

There are many good reasons to have your dog get used to being crated. And you might as well start out by teaching your dog to enjoy it, because trying to catch a dog and shove him in a crate when he really doesn't want to can be frustrating and a waste of your time.

I use a training program that incorporates the use of the dog's daily meal. After all, who says you need to use a food bowl?

Measure out the amount of food that your dog gets during a day and put it aside. This is what you'll use during the day to teach your dog to go into his crate on cue, and to enjoy being there. You can do many short little sessions throughout the day to speed this process along. And you can even do three or four two minute sessions within the same hour!

Reasons your dog might be crated:

- ◆ Crating works well for housetraining, and preventing chewing habits.
- ◆ Your groomer or vet may crate.
- ◆ You may want to crate in the car.

The first step is to take several pieces of food, hold them up to your dog's nose, and then place them just inside the door to the crate. Now ignore your dog and let him eat the food. Some dogs that have had a bad experience with being crated may not approach the crate for some time – but if he's hungry enough eventually he'll go and get his food – especially if you aren't near the crate and he doesn't feel you might shove him in and close the door. For this dog you might want to bump up the ante and place most of his food just inside the crate door.

Once the dog has eaten the food in the crate, repeat the process several more times. Once the dog is approaching and eating out of the crate just as soon as you put the food down, you can start to place the food further back inside the crate. This could happen immediately or it could take a day or two – make sure you're moving at a pace that your dog is setting. Rushing him when he isn't comfortable with the process won't ultimately make him comfortable with being crated – which is our goal.

Gradually over many sessions you'll place the food further and further back inside the crate. Eventually you'll get to a point where you've placed the kibble against the back wall of the crate. As the dog is eating the food in the back, toss several more pieces in the crate. Then call the dog out of the crate, place a pile way in the back again and repeat the process.

The step after this is to toss a piece or two of food in the back of the crate and add a verbal cue such as "get in the crate" or "kennel up". Once the dog has entered the crate you can add more food. Generally once you've reached this point you can try to just ask your dog to go in without first throwing the food inside. Wait about 5 seconds to see if he actually follows through. If he does immediately praise enthusiastically while at the same time tossing a handful of food towards the back of the crate.

During this whole process you have yet to actually close the door to the crate. This is the point where you'll start to do so. Close the door while your dog is eating, but open it back up again before he's finished. I'd do this many times over the course of a day or two.

We've just got a few more steps to go, so hang in there! Now you can ask the dog to enter the crate using your verbal cue, give him half his meal for the day, close the door to the crate and leave the room for just a minute or two. Come back in, open the door and ignore your dog. You don't ever want to enthusiastically greet your dog while you're letting him out of the crate, or your dog will learn the fun part of being crated is coming out of it.

After a few sessions like this you can put your dog in the crate, give him ½ his dog food for the day and leave your dog crated.

Once your dog is going willingly into his crate you can start using a food bowl again, and use only a small portion of his food as a reward for going in his crate when asked. Another thing I do is to stuff a toy with food, such as a Kong®, and give it to my dog. The advantage to this is that it can help prevent separation anxiety. If every time you leave your dog is busy eating, he'll be conditioned to associate your absence with something positive.

I hope your dog will learn to love his crate just as much as my own dogs do. Good luck!