

# Housebreaking Made Easy

By Bardi McLennan

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The thought of housebreaking a puppy brings groans from some and complaints from others. But take heart, puppy buyers, housebreaking need not be a difficult or painful chore. With the right approach and some consistent effort, your puppy can be housebroken faster than you ever thought possible. The keys to quick success are a training crate, a watchful owner and a consistent plan of action.

Before we get further into this subject, let's dispel any horrible thoughts of putting your dog, that trusted member of the family, that faithful companion, into a *cage*. As you've no doubt noticed, *c-a-g-e* is a four-letter word. You don't put family into a *cage*. Forget that word: from now on think of *crate* as it is commonly known, as the dog's very own *den*.

Canine species are *den* animals. That's why the family dog likes to relax in out-of-the-way spots, such as under the kitchen table, under your bed or in the back of a closet-any place that has the feel of a den. On the other hand, a dog with a crate has its very own den-like spot, out of bounds to the people in its life. Dogs derive a feeling of security from being in their crates.

Some animals use cages, such as hamster, gerbils, and mice. These pets live their entire lives in cages for their own protection. Your dog is not going to live in its crate. It will rest in it, sleep in it, travel in it, possible even eat in it. When it is not doing those things in its den (or crate) it will be with the rest of its "pack"- its people.

The crate's first use is as the dog's bed, but also an excellent natural training tool.

You wouldn't try to raise a baby without a crib. Why not give some thought to providing your puppy with a similar "safe place" while it grows and learns. Providing only a

rug or mat, or an open dog bed, gives a puppy too much freedom to find trouble. Put the bed in a crate, the pup is protected from such lures as electric cords and your new shoes. A crate will protect both your possessions and your dog.

I really do like dog beds, but most puppies (up to the age of two years or older) chew the pretty ones to pieces! I love the cedar-smelling ones (they inhibit fleas), the attractive baskets and even the cutesy beds for toy breeds. Provide these types of beds only for supervised napping while the dog is a pup. Later you can extend their usefulness-but they will never replace their crate. When a dog needs a den, it needs its crate, not an open bed.

## Introducing The Crate

Your pup's first experience with its crate should be pleasant. Place the crate on the floor and allow the puppy to check it out. Don't force the dog to go inside until it has had time to sniff every corner of the strange object. Prop the door open and place a few treats just inside the door. As the pup develops more and more courage, toss the treats to the back of the crate so that the pup must go inside to retrieve the goodies.

Line the crate floor with newspapers or a blanket. When the pup is comfortable in the crate, close the door and leave it shut for a few minutes.

Let the dog out without ceremony. Repeat the process several times, gradually extending the length of the closed-door sessions.

The pup may complain a time or two about being confined. Do not reward the dog for whining.

By opening the crate door there is no need for punishment, but do remain firm. Ignore the protests and they will soon stop. The dog should learn from the start that there's no punishment connected with its bed and that life's more pleasant when it complies with the rules!

When the puppy is comfortable in its crate, you're ready to take advantage of all the wonderful uses for this marvelous invention.



## Houstraining with a Crate

If you follow this easy schedule you'll find houstraining is as easy as falling in love with a puppy!

**Morning:** Let's begin first with thing in the morning, being fully aware that "first thing" may be earlier than you had in mind! Things will get easier as the pup gets older. At the first peep, whine or bark in the morning, open the crate door and immediately *carry* the smaller pup (attaching the leash as you go) or leash-lead the larger one, to the exact spot you want the dog to use. Just stand and let the pup wander about on its leash. This is *not* a walk. It's a "business trip".

Make up a term that means "potty" to the dog. Some common ones are "potty" "go-pee" or the one that makes me feel better on snowy mornings "hurry-up!" Once you've chosen a word or phrase all the family should use it. As the puppy piddles, say "go-o-o-d dog." Follow with more standing on your part and more exploring on the part of the pup-but only in that one small area. If you find you are just staring at each other, move the leash back and forth to get the pup moving again. When the puppy has a bowel movement, give more praise-just an approving "good dog" not standing ovation -and take the pup back inside.

Using a leash, even inside a fenced area or while paper-training has many advantages. You are there to express immediate approval; your dog goes in the place you have chosen; your dog will be at ease to relieve itself on leash away from home. Don't laugh! "Outside" is a good one-word cue for the dog. "Do you want to go outside?" emphasizing the key word. The pup will catch on.

If the pup messes in the crate before waking you, don't scold. Set the alarm for 15 to 20 minutes earlier and be certain the pup relieves itself before going into the crate at night. You may even try changing its feeding schedule and removing the water dish a little earlier. This should help the pup make it through the night. Your *goal is prevention, not punishment.*

As the pup matures, and when you have time, go for a walk right after the dog has eliminated. Or, if you have a fenced yard, the older pup might like to run around on its own for a while. Then it's breakfast time for your canine baby!

Place the dog's food dish and water bowl side by side in the crate. Allow 15 to 20 minutes for the dog to dine. Remove it when the time is up whether or not the pup has eaten all the food. Now take the pup back outside to that same spot. (Maybe this is really why so many dogs are called "Spot".) When the pup has eliminated, or if after 5-10 minutes it shows no sign of wanting to go, play or go for a short walk. Then back to that spot again. It's extremely important to be right there to say "good dog" as the pup eliminates (at least for the first couple of weeks.) It is basic puppy training, however, and will last a lifetime.

Now is a good time for some supervised freedom to explore other parts of the house, but only with supervision. In a working household, this may be a weekend luxury. If you're occupied, getting family or self ready for the day, place the puppy back in its crate with some chew toys to amuse it while you finish your own morning rituals.

**Daytime:** Be sure to monitor your pup's activities throughout the day. When the pup sniffs, walks in circles and appears anxious, it's your cue to head to the "potty spot" with the puppy. The success of housebreaking depends on your quick response to the cue. If the puppy is successful again and again, it will soon begin to head for the spot when it feels the urge. If you can't constantly supervise the puppy, put it in the crate when you're busy. Just don't let it make a "mistake."

If the pup must be left alone, place the crate in a restricted area, such as a kitchen or bathroom with a gate across the door, and leave its crate door open. Turn the radio on low (dogs have super hearing), put some safe toys in the crate and leave just one patch of newspapers on the floor for an emergency. If you put newspapers all over the floor, the *pup* will decide where to go, which could be just about anywhere. By putting three or four thickness for newspaper in one spot (maybe beside the outside door, ) *you* have taken charge.

If you plan to be gone for only a few hours, take the dog outside to eliminate before you leave. Then put the dog in the crate with a small treat and a couple of toys. Latch the crate door; turn on the radio and leave. (Just take off. No speeches!) if you'll be gone for more than two hours, confine the young pup in a restricted area as described above. Older dogs can remain in their crate a little longer; ask your veterinarian for an opinion on how long your pup can be expected to go without urinating or defecating.

When you return, *immediately* take the puppy out to its very own spot. (If you live in a city, and curb the pup, let's hope you've chosen a "no parking" area for that spot, and remember to carry clean-ups with you!)

**Bedtime:** A young pup's last meal should be later than 8:00 pm followed by a drink of water. Then remove the water bowl. An hour or so before your bedtime, take the pup out for the last time.

Put the crate in your bedroom before putting the dog to bed for the night. Then put the puppy in to its crate with a toy and a plain puppy biscuit.

Your mere presence will be comforting, so don't fall into the trap of talking to the pup as you're going to bed, or it will try to stay up and keep you company! If you go about your business of calling it a day, the pup will, too. Don't fall for that old "ticking clock and hot water bottle" routine, either. The pup was surely weaned before you got it, so it doesn't need its "mother's heartbeat." All you'll end up with is a destroyed clock; a hot water bottle full of tiny tooth pricks and a soaking wet puppy! The important thing is that you'll be there to hear the very first sound that signals the first of many trips outside.

When you put your pup in the crate and say good night, mean it. *No* going back to say good night later. No response to crying, whining or barking, if you are certain the pup relieved itself before entering the crate. Don't even punish the pup if it fusses. Your angry shout of "Quiet!" is (to the pup) a response to its cries. The puppy reasons that any reply is better than none, so it will be encouraged to keep it up. Things will get better each night. A well socialized puppy will very likely be sound asleep before you turn out your light, and you'll be the one staying awake to watch your new pride and joy.

By adhering to a constant schedule, you can housebreak your puppy in only a few days. But don't rush to brag to your friends. Continue to monitor the pup's actions for several months. If the pup soils your house, be sure to clean the area immediately with a commercial odor-eliminator or a solution of vinegar and water. If the pup is allowed to "mark" places in the house, it will return again and again to mark that spot. It could even generalize that marking the house is permissible. Do not punish the dog for house soiling—unless you catch the pup in the act of soiling! Other wise the dog will not understand the reason for the punishment.

### Other Uses

**Car Travel:** The crate physically protects the dog in the car, but does far more. It restrains the dog in case of a small fender-bender. In the case of a serious accident, the crated dog will not be thrown into the windshield or out the window. The dog cannot escape from the car to become lost or even killed. The crate also enables anyone coming to your rescue to remove the dog quickly from the scene. This alone could save time needed to assist people.

Two hundred thousand dogs are killed each year from falling jumping or being thrown from cars and pickup trucks. A crate secured in the back of a pickup, with a form of protection from the weather, means you really care.

**Traveling Bed:** If you travel with your dog, its crate is invaluable. When you take a crate along, the dog identifies with the security of this little piece of home. You can prevent nights of lost sleep if you take a crate with you to the hotel, campsite or friends home.

If you must leave the dog for a short outing while you're on the road, be sure to leave the dog in its den. You will be a welcome guest if your dog displays good manners. A dog that whines, destroys property, or soils the facilities is not likely to receive invitations to return.

If air travel is in your plans, the crate will be the vessel that carries your dog to your destinations. If your dog is already crate-trained, the trip will be less stressful. A calm dog will not need tranquilizers to travel in a crate.

If a friend volunteers to puppy-sit while you're traveling, the dog's crate can go to the friend's house for the stay. Your friend will appreciate the convenience of having the crate at his or her disposal.

**In Home Confinement:** There are times that your dog is just in a way. If you're cooking and the dog is underfoot, it would be safer in its crate. A dropped pot caused by an in-the-way dog is dangerous to the dog and you.

Some friends are just not suited to enjoying your dog's company. Older people and children often are better guests when your dog is out of the way. The dog won't mind spending some time in its' special place.

Crate training plays a major role in preventing separation anxiety. The stress of being abandoned can cause dogs to chew through doors, walls and carpets when left alone. A correctly crate-trained dog seldom experiences the panic of being left alone, even though it may occasionally try to change your mind about going to work!

For the injured dog, or the dog that is recovering from surgery, the crate will help the healing process. When the veterinarian advises you to keep the dog quiet and still, the crate provides a way to comply with the instructions.

Once you've discovered all the fine uses for a dog's crate, and after you see how much the dog likes its' crate, you will develop an even longer list of uses for it I wouldn't think of owning a dog without it.

### Types of Crates:

**Plastic:** There are two basic types of crates available wherever pet supplies are sold: plastic and wire. The molded plastic crates separate into two halves for storage. They are very strong and most are accepted by airlines for transporting dogs. Even the larger sizes are lightweight. Although there are grids in the sides and the door for the dog to get air and see out, the sturdy plastic provides good protection from drafts.

You will need to add flooring so the dog is not lying directly on the plastic, which is a conductor of temperature extremes. Grid flooring is sold separately, or most lumberyards will cut a thin piece of fiberboard to fit.

Another safety feature is the door lock, which requires a coordinated hand to open-paws and jaws need not apply!

**Wire:** The other common type of crate is made of heavy gauge wire. There are many fine manufactures

of wire crates, but the strength of the crate should be a consideration in making your final selection. Most wire crates have a slide-out metal floor that is easy to clean.

Wire crates allow for maximum choose air circulation and are often chosen by those who travel by car with their dogs. Check to see that the crate you choose is airline approved.

Wire crates do not have the same enclosed atmosphere that other crates do, but blanket or cover can give your dog that den felling.

**Wood and Aluminum:** Wooden crates today are mostly used by professional handlers for transporting dogs to and from dog show. They are usually custom made, can be quite handsome, and are extremely heavy and not very practical for the pet owner.

The all-aluminum folding crates, also are used professionally, does not serve the average pet owner as well as the plastic or wire crate. Aluminum crates are lightweight and can't be chewed. So they're practical for shipping large dogs. Remember, metal is a conductor of heat and cold, so protection from temperature extremes is essential. The aluminum crate manufacturers have some wonderful designs that dog show enthusiasts appreciate. They often come with build-in wheels for transporting and a built-in grooming surface on the top that eliminates the need to take another table to the show.

The price of a crate is determined by the size and by the construction materials. Prices range from \$30 to more than \$100 for very large or customized models, but the returns on your investment is tremendous!



### **A Puppy Layette**

Before you bring your bundle of fur to live in your home, spend some time preparing for the arrival. You should have these items waiting for the little pup!

- A crate
- Old towels for bedding
- Two or three toys-some hard and some soft!
- Dog food (ask your veterinarian what food is recommended and begin to switch from old to new slowly. Mix 1/4 new food to old food for 3 days, then 1/2 new to old for 3 days, then 1/4 old to new food for 3 days, then switch totally to new food. This is to avoid stomach upset and/or diarrhea)
- Food and water dishes
- Puppy care information
- Collar (not choke type until puppies are older)
- Leash
- Brush, comb and grooming supplies
- Pet odor-remover

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