

Dog Crates

The crate: a modern dog den

"Canis familiaris," the domestic dog, is descended from "Canis lupus," the wolf. Many thousands of years ago, wolves hung around caves, stealing morsels from man at the dawn of civilization. Submissive wolves may have left their canine pack to take up residence at the periphery of human camps. In return for watchdog duty, these beasts probably received food, shelter, and companionship in the human pack. Genetic variability and mutations in wolves produced domestic dogs of an amazing variety of sizes, shapes, and colors, dogs that were further refined into breeds created for specific purposes. Although the terrier puppy has never seen the great north woods and the Samoyed down the street never hunted a moose with a silent pack of wolves, they have wolf habits in common with all other breeds of dogs. All puppies, in the manner of wolves, need a den. Pianos and tables make great dens, but furniture doesn't have sides for confinement. Laundry rooms, spare bathrooms, and even playpens are too big for a puppy den; there's enough room in these enclosures for the pup to defecate or urinate in one area and still have room to play or sleep without stepping in the mess.

In the wolf den, the mother wolf cleans up the cubs feces until the youngsters are old enough to defecate away from the den. The cubs learn that the den is a place to keep clean as well as a place of safety and comfort.

A modern den can be a Fiberglas or wire crate that can be kept in any room in the house. It should be barely large enough for the pup to lie down comfortably. If your pup is one of the large breeds and you don't want to buy several crates as he grows, buy an adult-size crate and partition it so it fits his current size.

The crate is a multi-purpose piece of dog paraphernalia. It can be used for:

Housetraining

Simply take the pup outside after each nap or meal. Do not play with him until he has done his business. If he hasn't relieved himself in about 10 minutes, take him back inside and put him in the crate. Repeat the routine in 10-15 minutes. Remember, no play until the pup does his business and lots of praise when he gets the idea.

Protection from excited toddlers.

Children need to learn that the pup needs some quiet time. A blanket over a wire crate will help a child understand that it's time for Ranger to rest.

Playpen for puppies when you're not home.

If you need to take the kids to school or go to the grocery store, the pup that's crated will not chew the furniture or wet the carpet while you're gone. If he has already wet the carpet or chewed the furniture, you can put him in the crate and issue a stern warning that there'll be no more of that going on.

Sanctuary for the over-excited pup.

Don't let Rambo run amok through the house, terrorizing the cat, the kids, and the furniture, and don't feel guilty about restricting his freedom. Sending the pup to his crate is somewhat akin to sending a child to his room: he feels comfortable there and he knows you are angry, and you have a chance to recover from his outburst.

After the pup is housebroken, leave the crate open during the day. You'll find that the pup will nap in the crate by choice. You can continue to put the pup in the crate when you'll be away from the house as long as you don't leave puppies and young dogs confined too long and make sure they have plenty of exercise when you are home. People often cringe at the thought of putting their beloved Star in a box or cage. They think confinement is cruel. After all, people don't want to be enclosed in a space they can barely turn around in. But puppies aren't people. Their wolf ancestors found comfort, safety, and shelter in their dens, and modern dogs find solace and satisfaction in their own space as well.