

CRATE TRAINING BASICS

By Vanessa vom Lehn

Have you ever seen a dog or puppy laying under the kitchen table or desk? All canines, especially young puppies, like to sleep in a place that they feel safe and protected from predators. In the wild, wolf puppies are born in a den, which can be a hal-
lowed out log, small cave or other small covered area. Puppies have a “den instinct,” which is to sleep in small, safe area and to never poop or pee in that area. Domesticated dogs and wolves are very close to being genetically identical. *“The domestic dog is an extremely close relative of the gray wolf, differing from it by at most 0.2% of mitochondrial DNA sequence. In comparison, the gray wolf differs from its closest wild relative, the coyote, by about 4% of mitochondrial DNA sequence.”*

Adult dogs, when preparing for the birth of puppies, even if they have never dug before, will try to create dens for their puppies by digging in the yard, under the bed, behind the sofa, or wherever they feel is safe. By purchasing a crate for your puppy, you are recreating the den, and as a bonus, the den is a place where the puppy is completely safe from the hazards in your home. Since puppies should not pee or poop in their den, you can control *when* and *where* the puppy will pee and poop.

Some have told me that they feel crate training is cruel. I assure you, it is not. This is natural for puppies, and once they understand the crate is their den, they will LOVE it. I can guarantee that what is cruel, is punishing a puppy for peeing in the house, when they had no idea they were doing something wrong. Then ultimately getting rid of the dog because “they just won't pee outside.”



WILD WOLF DENS



DOMESTIC DOG DENS

MYTHS ABOUT CRATE/POTTY TRAINING:

1. My puppy is screaming and barking in the crate because he's scared or he hates the crate.

- The truth is the puppy most likely is crying because he is alone. And he is not sure the crate is the safe place yet. He may initially think he is "stuck" in there. Like if he was outside playing and he fell in a hole or something. The only way to teach him this is the safe place is by letting him stay in there and realize nothing bad is happening. I will cover the *Introduction To the Crate* later.

2. My puppy/dog pees and poops in the house because he is punishing me.

- Even the smartest dogs are not capable of this kind of strategy. Dogs have no way of knowing that you value the carpet, that it's a hassle for you to clean, or that you work and have to earn and spend money replacing items they've destroyed. To dogs, all the world is a chew toy. If they were in the forest, they would pee, poop and eat on the dirt, trees, rocks and grass.

3. My puppy pees when I bend down to pet him or when he meets a stranger, so he must not be able to hold it.

- This is submissive urination and is a COMPLETELY separate issue from potty training. This will be discussed in a separate article, but a few tips would be to IGNORE the dog, avoid eye contact, avoid leaning over the dog at times when you suspect you will see the submissive urination behavior.

4. I need to get my puppy a very large crate so he can have room to spread out.

- If you buy a crate that is too large, it will lose the "den" feeling and your puppy will pee on one side of the crate and sleep on the other. The crate should be small enough that they cannot pee on one side and sleep on the other. And large enough for the puppy to turn a complete circle and spread out comfortably. I suggest buying a wire, collapsible crate that is big enough for your dog as an adult. Most crates now come with a PUPPY DIVIDER. This is a wire piece that allows you to adjust the size of the crate. Please see the other article on the website *Information on Bringing Your Puppy Home*.

INTRODUCING YOUR PUPPY TO THE CRATE:

When you bring your puppy home, he may be overwhelmed by all the new sights and smells. There is no rush to introduce him to the family dog. This will be addressed in another article. But please wait several days for that introduction.

I suggest putting your crate in a room with a tile or linoleum floor, just in case there are any accidents. I do recommend you feed your puppy in his crate. But I do not like putting a water bowl in there. It always spills, even if it clips to the side. Also for the first few weeks you are going to want to regulate water intake. (NO WATER OR FOOD 3 HOURS BEFORE BED, so if you go to bed at 10pm, no water or food after 7pm.

When you bring your puppy into the home, immediately carry the puppy to backyard and offer her water. See if she will pee in the grass. If she does, praise her!

Go to the room where the crate is and let her sniff around. Take a treat, or even just dog food and use it to lure the puppy inside the crate. Think baby steps. Lure her to the door, give treat, let her stick her head in the crate, give a treat. Once the puppy is in, drop some treats in the crate and let her find them. Then use the treats to lead her out of the crate.

You can continue to play with the puppy in that room. And when the puppy finally lays down in the corner and wants to go to sleep. Put her in the crate, close the door, and walk away. Your puppy may bark and cry at first. DO NOT LET HER OUT WHEN SHE IS CRYING. This will only reinforce that crying is the magic switch that makes the door open. This may be a good time to go get coffee or go out to dinner! That way you don't have to listen to the crying. I suggest leaving the puppy in for about an hour or so. Remember, puppies sleep A LOT and once she settles down she will probably take a good nap.

When the puppy is NOT crying, let him out and walk to the back door. If you are home, keep your eye on the crate and as soon as she wakes up, rush over to the crate before she cries, beat her to the punch! If your puppy won't follow you, just pick him up and take him outside. You can work on the following later. Since he has been holding his pee a long period of time, he should pee outside. If he doesn't, play outside for 5-10 minutes. When he pees, say, "Goo Potty!" and then praise him when he is done.

WHEN DO PUPPIES NEED TO GO TO THE BATHROOM?

- Puppies should poop within 5-30 minutes after eating. So if they are eating 3 times a day, they will most likely poop 3 times a day. Keep in mind that the quantity and quality of the food you feed will affect this. Also, dogs under stress may poop more often or have looser stools. If your puppy's stools are mushy for more than a day or so, feed him less. Over feeding can cause diarrhea. If that does not do the trick, contact your vet because your puppy may have picked up worms or a parasite. This is easily treatable with over the counter, fenbendazol. So if you are comfortable, you could treat the puppy without seeing the vet.
- Young puppies will pee about every half an hour, but this varies. Most of the time when you bring a puppy home from a breeder, they have NEVER had to hold their pee before, so this a new concept by itself. By about 12 weeks, your puppy should be able to hold it 8 hours a night. This of course, varies. Larger puppies seem to be able to hold it longer.
- Puppies should always pee or poop after EAT, SLEEP and EXERCISE.
- EVERY time you take your puppy out of the crate he needs to go directly outside to pee. Keep in mind, if you want your dog to pee in the rocks versus the grass, always take him to the rocks. I suggest teaching your puppy to pee and poop in an area where your kids do not play. It's just better.
- In general, once you are taking your puppy for walks and outside the house, teach him to pee and poo on different surfaces, rocks, grass, dirt etc. You do not want a dog that will refuse to poop unless he has grass.
- If you have trouble getting your puppy to poop, get him to run or chase a ball.
- EVERYTIME your puppy is peeing or pooping, say, "Go potty" and eventually your dog will eliminate on command. This comes in VERY handy.

HOW DO I START?

Puppies are able to be crate trained around 7.5 weeks.

Introduce your puppy to the crate as described in this article

When you are home, you may want to handle the puppy in rotations.

1. Pee
2. Play for 15-20 minutes
3. Pee
4. Play for 10 minutes
5. Crate for 40 minutes. Then start over at step one. This is a general guideline for young puppies. Use your own judgment for your individual puppy.

When you are gone for long periods of time, I recommend (weather permitting) setting up an exercise pen outside for the puppy to run and play and have access to a potty area. You may not need a pen, if your backyard is free of danger. **POOLS ARE VERY DANGEROUS TO PUPPIES.** There is an article on this website on teaching your puppy how to swim. Also, if you live in an area where there are hawks, owls or other predators, use caution when leaving your puppy outside. Again, use your best judgment.

I hope this helps. Remember: take young puppies out VERY often, every 10 minutes if you have a well hydrated puppy! It doesn't hurt.