



## CRATE ESCAPES

FOR EASIER HOUSE-TRAINING, TAP INTO YOUR DOG'S DENNING INSTINCTS // BY RUTHANNE JOHNSON // ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID POHL

**STEPHANIE PITTS** knew she had her work cut out for her. The Los Angeles resident had adopted a 6-week-old long-haired dachshund from her employer, who'd scooped him up from someone selling puppies outside a Starbucks. Tucker's unbelievable cuteness aside, Pitts knew the training process would be filled with lots of puppy mistakes: freewheeling pottyting, chewing, digging, and just generally getting into trouble.

Fortunately for Pitts, working in a dog-friendly office allowed her to keep a watchful eye over her young companion. Another lucky break: Her employer had just hired the celebrated dog coach Tamar Geller to help the office dogs. On Geller's advice, Pitts began using Tucker's soft-sided travel crate as a house-training tool. In a few weeks, he was unfailingly using his pee pad or going outside. "He just loves his crate," says Pitts.

Teaching house rules to a new dog can be a challenge, especially when it comes to puppies. Limited time in a crate (no more than a few hours at a time) can expedite house-training and keep your pet out of

trouble while you're working together on rules such as chewing and other destructive behaviors. After your pup has mastered inside manners, the crate can serve a new purpose, providing a familiar space when traveling or a cozy getaway from noisy guests. But to get to that point, you and your pup need to share the same view of the crate.

Crating shouldn't go on all day and night; that doesn't allow enough exercise or human interaction and can lead to a depressed or frustrated dog. And a crate isn't jail time for bad behavior but a comfortable place where your pet can enjoy some downtime. "A common way people use the crate is to call the dog to come and they shove him in the crate," Geller says. "By doing that, you are ruining the 'come' command"—and teaching your dog to dislike the crate. Remember, too, that a crate doesn't replace teaching your dog correct behaviors related to chewing, barking, or getting on furniture.

For 26 years, Geller has been coaching dogs using love, play, and mutual respect—a strategy she writes about in her best-seller *The Loved Dog*. The crate taps into your dog's denning instincts, she says: Dogs prefer not to lie in their waste and will try not to soil inside their crate, which they view as their den. Increased time in the crate followed by a quick trip outside and rewards for each success teaches them how to hold it and where to go.

To start, you need to get your dog comfortable with the crate. To pique his interest, Geller suggests tossing a chew toy or favorite treat inside or placing his food in the back of the kennel. "You teach them

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## YOUR PET //

to associate the crate with really, really good things.” This can be reinforced with rewards for going in but not for coming out.

For puppies younger than 3 months, start with two-hour increments in the crate. “It’s like when you have a baby and put them down for a nap,” Pitts says. To expend Tucker’s youthful energy, Pitts gave him a chew toy. If he whined, she tossed a magazine next to the crate as an annoying distraction. When Tucker eliminated outside or on the pee pad after his nap, Pitts provided lavish praise, a favorite treat, and 30 minutes of playtime outside the crate. If he didn’t go, she re-crated him for 10 minutes and tried again.

Once Tucker was fully trained, the door to his crate stayed open. Today, he sometimes uses it to get away from his high-strung dachshund housemate, Andy. Other times, he’ll curl up inside for a power nap. “Whenever I tell [him] to go in the crate, he runs into it with his tail wagging, like he’s getting ready for a party,” says Pitts. “He knows it means we’re going somewhere [or] getting a treat.”

## TIPS FOR CRATE-TRAINING SUCCESS

### SACRED SPACES

Crates come in all types, including hard plastic, metal bars, and nylon. Whatever style you choose, the crate should be large enough for your pet to stand up and turn around comfortably but disallow extra room to eliminate. Because dogs are social, the crate should be placed in a room with activity, like the living room, away from excessive heat or cold. “The crate should also be convenient to the exit door when you are training,” says KC Theisen, HSUS director of pet care issues. “You don’t want to have to go through five rooms to get your puppy outside.”

### BIDDING TIME

Puppies and some older dogs have limited bladder and bowel control and shouldn’t spend more than three or four hours in the kennel at a time. For adult dogs, stick with five to six hours maximum, except for overnight sleeping. Once your pet is reliably house-trained, leave the door open.

### SLOW AND STEADY

Previous experiences can affect a dog’s response to the crate. For example, pet store and puppy mill dogs are forced to eliminate in their cages. Because their natural instincts were frustrated, patience is key in the crate-training process. Theisen’s late dog, Jessica, was a pet store keeshond surrendered by her family after seven years because of house-training issues. Theisen started Jessica with 15-minute periods in the crate and enlisted her roommate to help when she couldn’t be home. Rather than using punishment, she ignored Jessica’s mistakes. “Eventually, she got enough praise for going outside and learned how to hold it,” she says.

### CRATE HATERS

Some dogs never get used to being closed up in a kennel. One alternative is to place the crate, door open, in a medium-sized room, such as a puppy-proofed kitchen. Set food and water near the crate and pee pads several feet away, and use a gate rather than a closed door to block off the room so your pet won’t feel isolated. Another method for pups who won’t accept the crate is to tether the dog to you, says training expert Tamar Geller. “And just love on them and show them how to use the outside or the pee pad and give them [rewards] when they succeed.”

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