

CRATE TRAINING

(from THE BRITTANY: Amateurs Training with Professionals)

By

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Crate training is the simple process of introducing a puppy to a crate and is one of the most important steps in teaching a puppy to become a well-mannered adult. Besides a leash and collar, a crate is one of the most important pieces of equipment to have when you bring your new Brittany puppy home. This is where he will sleep at night and stay during the day for short periods of time when he can't be supervised. It can also be used in the car when he travels with you.

If you haven't used a crate before, your initial reaction may be to think that confining pup in a crate is cruel. But it is important to consider that the Brittanys' ancestors were cave dwelling animals. If you watch your pup, he instinctively finds a protected spot when he lies down to take a nap because dogs are den animals by nature. A crate simulates a den and offers security, privacy, and protection.

Over the next couple of weeks your job will be to get the pup accustomed to the crate. Like everything in dog training, it must be introduced to him in stages.

- First, let him investigate the crate by leave the door open, so he can go in or out.
- Put a treat or toy in there and let him find it.
- Keep the crate in a busy area during the day and leave him in it for short periods.
- At night, move the crate into the bedroom so he can sleep near you.

If he cries when you crate him, ignore him. Eventually he will stop. If you feel sorry for him and let him out, you are rewarding him for crying and he will only cry more. Always wait until he is quiet before letting him out.

Crate training is also useful for housebreaking. A pup instinctively doesn't want to soil his den so he learns to "hold it." Young puppies may not be able to "make it" through the night and may need to be let out, but you will be surprised at how easy house breaking is when you use a crate.

As your pup grows, if he starts to get into everything or seems uncontrollable, the crate will help you maintain control. However, never use the crate for punishment. Remember, the crate is where he feels safe. As he gets more comfortable with the crate, begin to say "Kennel" every time you put him in. Eventually you will say, "Kennel" and he will go into his crate no matter where he is in the room. This works really well if you have a toy or treat waiting for him. Leave the door open, and he may surprise you by going into the crate when he wants to take a nap.

There are many different styles and sizes of crates. Crate styles include the plastic airline type and others that are all wire. The plastic airline crate offers more security and is the most popular. If you chose a wire crate, put a blanket over the crate to keep out the light during the day. The size of the crate depends on the size of the dog. The crate should be large enough to allow a dog to lie down, to stand up (shoulder clearance) and to turn around. If the crate is too large, it loses its housebreaking effectiveness because the pup can defecate in it. Full-grown Brittanys generally require an intermediate size crate. This crate is about 22" wide by 32" deep by 23" high. Many people buy a crate to fit the adult dog and then block off the back half with a piece of plywood while the pup is still small.

While there are few stages in a dog's life as enjoyable as puppy hood, consider that most bad habits are learned in the first year. Preventing a bad behavior from starting is easier than trying to correct it later on. Brittanys are an energetic breed, and you may find he's creating havoc in the house while you are absent or can't supervise him. Crating him will help control his activity. Be vigilant so you can stop bad behaviors as soon as they start.

Crate training is key to raising a pup that will become a well-mannered adult. If you encounter any problems with crate training, talk to your veterinarian. Have fun with your pup and good luck.

Piney Run Kennel
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