

PUPPY LOVE SHELTIES
P.O. BOX 233
29 PALMS, CA 92277-0233
760-362-4022

THE DEN INSTINCT

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Here's a little known fact for new dog owners: Most dogs like crates. To them, it is their haven, their den, their "home away" from, well, home. Although many owners are reluctant to train their puppies to use a crate, doing so can ease the housebreaking period, help puppies to travel safely, and give them a comfortable place to retreat for peace and quiet. Here are some crating tips:

* Most puppies quickly come to consider their crate - especially when it's padded with a towel or pillow liner - a den. And since, by nature, dogs do not like to soil their dens, using a crate during housebreaking can help teach young puppies when and where it is appropriate to "go".

* It is important to purchase a well-ventilated crate that gives your dog plenty of room to comfortably stand up, lie down, and turn around. If the crate is too big for the puppy, install a divider so the puppy uses only half of the crate (if the crate is too large, the puppy may eliminate in one end and sleep in the other).

* Timing is everything. Although many puppies can make it through the night, they should only stay in the crate for a few hours at a time during the day.

* Although most puppies learn quickly, they cannot always control their urges. Should your puppy soil his crate, do not harshly reprimand him, but quickly take him outside and praise him for going where he is supposed to.

Finally, a crate should NEVER be used as a punishment, but should be encouraged as a place for your puppy to relax, sleep and get away from the world.