

Crates & Carriers

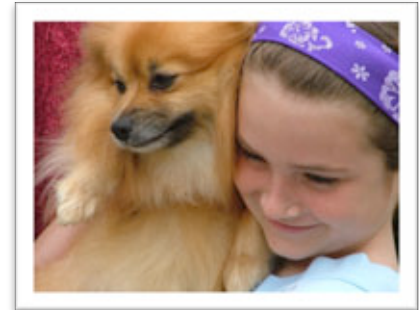
Dr. Marty Becker's Guide
for Pet-Lovers

**Fast, simple
solutions to
your pet-care
challenges from
“America’s
Veterinarian.”**

With Mikkel Becker,
CPDT, KA, CTC



Your dog or cat is a member of your family, and he has certain needs, just as any other family member does. Those needs include the ability to be safe in the home, to have a comfortable place to retreat when he wants some down time—a room of his own to chill, if you will—and to have that familiar, safe and comfortable space wherever he goes: in the car, at the veterinary clinic, groomer’s, boarding facility or at a hotel or other unfamiliar place. This portable “room” is a crate or carrier that will serve as your pet’s comfort zone in all kinds of situations.



For dogs, a crate is useful for house-training, safety, emergency evacuation and travel, whether by vehicle or air. With the exception of house-training—cats come fully wired for that behavior—a crate or soft carrier has the same benefits for cats, plus one more: it helps them to stay cool, calm, collected and cocooned at the veterinarian’s, a big plus for everyone involved. Both dogs and cats can learn to love their personal travel pod when it is correctly introduced. In this booklet, we’re going to show you how to make the crate your pet’s best friend—and yours.

Let’s get started!

What a crate is—and isn’t

Besides being your pet’s safe spot, a crate is a management and transportation tool. It allows you to feel confident that your as-yet-untrained puppy is squared away and out of trouble during those times when you can’t watch him: When you’re fixing dinner or in the bathroom, for instance. It’s an easily portable and protective enclosure when your dog or cat is riding in the car. You will soon find just how many uses a crate has.

The most important thing to know is that a crate isn’t a cage or a jail. Think of it as a nice, cozy bedroom where your dog will sleep at night and rest comfortably during times when you are busy and can’t supervise his every move. A crate is a restful retreat for a dog who needs a break from noisy kids, unfamiliar house guests, other pets or simply too much activity. When you travel, your dog or cat’s crate or carrier is his home away from home, an RV of sorts. It keeps him safe while he’s riding in a car and makes him feel secure in a hotel room, camping or new house. And it’s a familiar enclosure on an airline flight, whether he’s traveling first-class in the cabin or as cargo in the, well, cargo area.

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Using a crate to raise a puppy is kind and fair because it provides the pup with a lesson for life. Not only does the puppy learn when to and where *not* to relieve himself, he also grows up feeling relaxed, safe and secure in confinement. Though the first lesson is for puppies, the second is forever. Dogs (and cats) who are

comfortable in crates can be more safely transported, and they are generally more relaxed if they have to stay at the veterinary hospital, visit the groomer or boarded.

Bottom line: The expanded use of crates, once just for shipping by air, has been one of the more significant advances in dog training and care.

Get with the program, for your dog's sake



Crates have been shown to be essential for countless situations beyond their beginnings as a safe way to transport animals by air.

Before you bring your new dog home, you need to set up a home-within-a-home for him: a crate, or kennel. This essential tool will help your pup settle happily into his new digs. Learning to be comfortable in a crate is an essential part of being a modern dog, since confinement is a normal part of every dog's life, whether for a stay at the veterinarian or a boarding kennel or a ride in a car or plane. A dog who is comfortable in a crate is easier to evacuate during a natural disaster or other emergency situation. All dogs should be familiar with and comfortable in a crate.

That's because puppies don't come house-trained, and they don't know what's safe to chew. For decades now, crate training has been the standard for helping to manage puppies while they learn how to be well-behaved dogs in the home. There is no doubt that the use of a crate has saved many a puppy, either by preventing him from eating something harmful or by making house-training so relatively easy that the human-animal bond doesn't unravel during the throes of canine adolescence. Remember, a puppy's first year is equivalent to about 18 human years, so he'll go through the "terrible twos" and "teenage years" in a single year.

A crate keeps your puppy out of trouble and out of harm's way. When he is safely tucked into his crate, he's not chewing on electrical cords, nibbling on tasty but toxic plants, counter-surfing, destroying that antique wood sculpture you brought back from your first trip to Thailand, swallowing those AA batteries you were planning to recharge or eating the food gifts you brought back from vacation. The savings in veterinary bills alone makes a crate well worth the price.

With a crate as his own personal den, your dog can still enjoy time with the family without getting underfoot. It's easy to move a crate from room to room so your pup can be in the kitchen with you while

you're preparing meals, in the family room while everyone watches television, and in the bedroom at night for some quality sleep time. A puppy in a crate with a chew toy is happy, and your home and belongings are safe from destruction. That's much kinder than banishing him to the backyard, away from the family, because he damaged something you valued or hurt himself because he got into something he shouldn't have.

Which crate?

The first decision you need to make about a crate is which type to get. Crates come in three basic materials: wire (metal), plastic, or nylon or some other strong, soft material. You can find good arguments in favor of each, so your choice simply depends on your needs. Will you move the crate frequently? Do you have little room to spare in your home? Will greater airflow or increased privacy be more important to your dog? Will you need to ship your dog by air? Will you also use the crate to transport a pet to the vet? The answers to these questions will help you decide which crate to purchase.

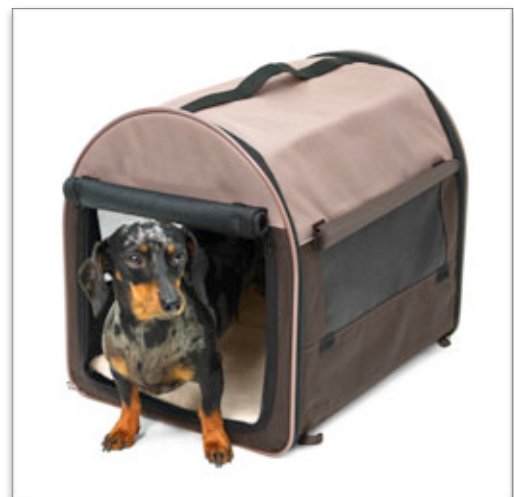
- **Wire crates.** Wire crates offer good ventilation and allow your dog to see out on all sides. If you want to give him some privacy or a greater sense of security, it's easy to purchase or make a cover. Wire crates are easy to stack if you have more than one dog, and they can be folded flat when you aren't using them. Some wire crates come with divider panels that allow you to purchase the size crate your puppy will need as an adult but limit the amount of space he has in it (see below for preferable size), gradually increasing it as he grows. One drawback is that wire crates are not appropriate for air travel. If you plan to ship your dog at some point in his life, he will need a hard plastic crate. When choosing a wire crate, be sure to pick one with very narrow spaces, so that a dog's leg cannot push through and cause injury. And always remove the pet's collar before putting them in the wire kennel.



- **Plastic crates.** Hard plastic crates are more private for dogs who like their space. Like wire crates, they can be stacked, but they don't break down easily for storage. They are well-suited for safe air and automobile travel. Some come with wheels for easy transport through busy airports. If you are concerned that the dog might have an accident inside the crate—a common occurrence with puppies purchased from pet stores, who are often difficult to house-train because they are accustomed to pottying in their kennel—look for a crate with a moat indentation around the inside edge of the floor. This area contains any liquids from a house-training accident or spilled water, leaving your puppy a cleaner place to lie down.



- **Soft-sided crates.** These are lightweight and easy to move around. The front and sides have panels you can roll down if your dog needs to rest or roll up to let him see what's going on. They collapse easily when not in use and are easy to clean. A soft crate can be a good choice for a mellow dog who uses it primarily as a retreat or nighttime sleep spot or for quick trips to the groomer or to be boarded. This is not the crate to buy, however, if your dog is a chewer or an escape artist who knows how to operate zippers. Even a small dog can damage or destroy a soft crate if he is determined to get out of it. They are also difficult to clean up if a house-training mess occurs. Soft-sided kennels are most suitable for well-behaved dogs who have already been crate-trained. A soft-sided kennel is not the best choice for your new puppy or a hyperactive dog who rakes the carrier like a canine Freddy Krueger. A tip is to always zip the door shut with the zippers at the bottom so that a Houndini can't use their claws to unzip the door.



Choosing the size and setting up the crate

For house-training purposes, your dog's crate should be just big enough for him to comfortably lie down and turn around but not so spacious that he can use a corner as a potty area and still have room to get away from the mess. Remember, a crate should be cozy, not castle-like. If your pup will grow from the size of a Tonka truck to the size of a tanker truck, get a full-size crate with a divider panel so it can grow right along with him.

You want to make your puppy's crate as comfortable as possible, but in the early days of crate training, accidents may happen. Instead of a fancy bed, line the bottom of the crate with an easy-to-clean towel or blanket. When your dog is fully house-trained, you can invest in something more luxurious including pads that are made specifically for each size of carrier. If you opt for a wire crate, make it more comfortable and cozy by draping a towel or blanket over the top for privacy.



Keep your puppy happy and busy in his crate by providing toys and chews for him to gnaw on. Choose toys that can't be broken into pieces that could choke your puppy. Food puzzles keep your puppy busy in a productive way, which will not only expend physical and mental energy but also help him learn to tolerate separation from you.

Feeding your puppy in his crate can help strengthen the positive association he has with the crate. But avoid giving him a big meal and then leaving him in his crate; a better reinforcement is a small smear of peanut butter inside a Kong toy, a Greenie, or an enzyme-impregnated rawhide chew like those from C.E.T. Giving your puppy unlimited access to water in the crate can undermine house-training progress since puppies must often urinate shortly after drinking. Instead, offer him plenty of access to water during the times when he is outside his crate. Just don't leave a pet for too long without water.

Learning to love the crate.

You may worry that your puppy or kitten won't like the crate, but if you introduce it properly—by making it pleasant and rewarding while also establishing that it's not optional—you will quickly find that your pet adapts quickly to his carrier.



Start by getting your pet used to seeing and being around the carrier. It should seem like just another piece of furniture on the floor. You want your pet to think of it as “fun furniture.” Play with, praise and treat your pet for being around it and in it, both with the door open and, briefly, with the door closed.

When the puppy walks into the crate, praise him and give him a toy or treat, but don't make a big fuss; be calm and matter of fact about it. Your puppy should associate positive experiences with the crate so he comes to think of it as a natural place to relax. Chillax!

Start to pair a word with the act of entering the carrier—“crate,” “in” and “load up” are some options—and then reward your pet when he goes in. When he makes the connection between the words and the action, double up on the treats and praise until he always thinks that going in on cue is the best thing in the world. Work up to longer periods with the door closed, then get your pet used to the sensation of the carrier being lifted and moved around.

Once your pet understands the cue to go into the crate, don't let him ignore you when you ask him to enter the carrier. Be patient and consistent, and always—always—reward the behavior you want.

Teaching your pet to enjoy the crate from the very beginning gives him a comfortable and safe retreat and provides you with a beneficial training and travel tool. It's a win-win for both of you.

Crate-training for fearful pets

Some young or adult animals come with negative associations toward being crated. The trauma of being left alone in a confined area often outweighs the lure of treats. There may even be a component of separation anxiety tied to their distress. If you are dealing with such a pet, there are several steps you can take to help overcome his fear.

Start by talking to your veterinarian about the possibility of separation anxiety. If you have the option, take a video recording of your pet when she's home alone and show it to your veterinarian. In many cases, pets with separation anxiety do better when they're not crated.

Once you've received guidance from your veterinarian about how to properly address separation anxiety — or rule it out altogether —

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you can proceed with retraining your pet to go inside the kennel. You should know that veterinarians have many powerful tools at their disposal to calm anxious pets including pheromone sprays like Adaptil (for dogs) and Feliway (for cats), natural products such as Anxitane, or more powerful prescription products like Reconcile (Prozac for pets) or generic Xanax. A veterinarian may recommend a follow-up visit with a veterinary behaviorist or trainer.

It's helpful to start with a different type of crate than what your pet has used in the past. For instance, if your pet has been used to staying in a hard-sided kennel, use a wire kennel for retraining.

For pets who have a fear of confinement, certain types of crates can be built up over time, allowing the animal to get used to the space at their own pace. For example, dogs can be trained to only go into the bottom half of a hard plastic kennel. Once they're comfortable, the top half can be placed onto the crate, followed later by the door. Begin training your pet to go into the crate by placing her food bowl just outside the crate. With each meal, move the dish farther toward the back of the kennel in gradual increments. Or toss tasty tidbits in the kennel like poker chip-sized slices of turkey hotdog or pieces of freeze-dried meat or organ (chicken, turkey, beef, fish, liver).



If your pet remains relaxed, you can practice shutting the door once she's inside the crate, and offer treats through the panels of the crate before immediately reopening it. Eventually, you can close the door for longer periods of time, and give her a stuffed Kong or some other long-lasting chew to distract her.

The crate should also be placed in an area that's not socially isolated. Choose a spot such as next to you while you watch TV. You can even leave the crate door open and allow your pet to choose whether she wants to go inside. As soon as she does go into the kennel, praise her and drop treats into the crate.

You should also deposit treats into the kennel throughout the day, so your pooch ventures inside often to check for goodies. Another trick is to spritz the crate with a pheromone spray that mimics the "at ease" feeling puppies experience when nursing or the similar pheromones that induce feelings of comfort in cats.

Avoid crating your pet for more than three or four hours at a time, unless it's overnight. If you plan to be gone for extended periods of time, consider looking into a day-care program or finding a dog walker who can let your pet out of the crate for a break.

Using the crate

You will find out just how many uses a crate has on the very first day you bring your puppy home. He will ride in it in the car when you bring him back from the breeder. When you get home, he will rest quietly in it after you've played with him and taken him out to potty. At meal time, he will eat inside it. And at bedtime, it's a safe and comfortable place for him to sleep.



To help give that first night—and all the following ones—a reassuring feel, set up the crate by your bed so your pup will be able to smell you and hear the sound of your breathing. Sleeping near you speeds the bonding process. Put a soft blanket inside the crate and a chew toy or two. Firmly say “Crate,” put your pup inside it, and close the door. Ignore any cries or whines, and don't yell at her or take her out if she's carrying on. Yelling teaches her that the crate isn't a nice place, and taking her out teaches her that all she need do is fuss and

she gets what she wants. Leave her be, and she'll soon settle down.

Young pups may wake once or twice during the night. If this happens, take the puppy out to relieve herself so she doesn't have an accident in the crate. Praise her when she potties, and then put her back in her crate. In a day or two, the worst of the heartbreaking crying is over and your pup will soon be sleeping through the night.

Crates are perfect for house-training

The best thing about a crate is that it is a fabulous house-training tool. Dogs are very clean, and they learn at an early age not to soil their sleeping area—the crate. Your favorite rug, sure, but a properly crate-trained pup won't slip up and make a mess in what he considers a room of his own.

Crate-training is the fastest, neatest way to teach your puppy not to do his business in the house. Crates work for house-training because your dog wants to keep his “den” clean. Puppy mothers start the process: they keep the whelping box clean by eating what tiny babies produce. Good breeders pick up where Mom left off by offering a clean area with enough room to step aside and potty to puppies who are weaned but not yet ready to go to their new homes—those that are from three weeks to twelve weeks old.

To use the crate effectively for house-training, a schedule is essential. During training, your puppy should always be in one of the following situations:

- “on empty” and playing under your supervision
- relieving himself in the place of your choice, which can be outdoors or on papers or pee pads
- confined to his crate for quiet chewing or sleeping

Here's an example:

First thing in the morning, take your puppy out of the crate, put a leash on his collar, and walk or carry him outside or to the spot you have chosen for him to relieve himself. If he starts to relieve himself on the trip outside, firmly say "No" and continue to the area you've chosen. The "carry" option is useful for preventing pups that are on the small side from trying to "go" before they get outside.

Make sure the chosen potty area is safe, free of distractions and comfortable. For instance, your puppy doesn't want to push through a scary jungle of tall grass to do his business. Say a word or phrase that you want to associate with the act of elimination such as "go potty," "hurry up," "get to it" or as we say in Northern Idaho where it's very cold in the winter, "be quick!" When he performs, praise him for going. Take him inside, feed him and let him drink some water, and then go outside again immediately. A full tummy puts pressure on a puppy's bladder. Give the chosen command, and praise him when he goes. Remember that a puppy has to go to the bathroom within 15 minutes of eating or drinking, upon waking up in the morning or after a nap, and after any play or exercise. Note: You need to make sure that puppies learn to go the bathroom on different substrates such as grass, gravel and concrete when they're being potty trained; otherwise, you may be traveling and have a pet that won't go potty because their familiar surface isn't present.



Let the puppy play in a small area under supervision, take him out again in an hour or so, and then put him in the crate for a nap. Repeat throughout the day.

A good rule of thumb: Puppies can "hold it" for as long as their age in months. A two-month-old pup can hold it in a crate for about two hours, for example.

Eventually, your pet will spend more of his time loose in the house under your supervision, and he will start asking to visit

his outdoor spot. His request may take the form of jumping up on you, looking at you and then heading for the door, or even just a change in expression. Watch him closely to learn his body language, and reward his attempts at proper behavior with praise and treats.

Remember, the goal is for your puppy to become reliable enough to roam free in your house, not to stay in a crate for life. Dog trainer and author Liz Palika sums this up nicely: "A crate is not a storage container for a dog."

Management of your dog

Beyond house-training, a crate is a great management tool. What do we mean by that? Simple. When your puppy is in his crate, contentedly gnawing on a toy, he can't be getting into trouble by chewing up your shoes, pooping on your favorite rug, or eating the kids' science fair project.

Take chewing. Like babies, puppies have an oral fixation, and anything and everything goes into their mouth. Puppies use their teeth to chew, play and pick up and carry things like humans use hands. All puppies chew, and chewing isn't bad. You'd chew too if your gums ached the way theirs do, especially when their adult teeth start coming in, around four months of age. The tricks to dealing with chewing are to redirect the behavior by keeping things you don't want your puppy to chew on out of reach, give approved chews and praise the pup for using them, and crate the puppy when you can't be there to supervise what he's doing. Never give a puppy free run of the house, allowing him to make his own decisions about what is and isn't chewable. If you cannot observe him, put him in a safe area that is free of objects he might chew. A crate is ideal, but you can also use a small area such as a laundry room with a baby gate across the door. Wherever you confine him, he should have access to a chew toy, a food puzzle or both!

Here are some other ways a crate can be a useful pet management tool.

- **Post-surgical rest.** A crate is a health care tool. It can help your pet recover safely after surgery or other treatment that requires hospitalization. While every effort is made by hospital staff to make a pet's stay less stressful, a pet's temperament, training and experience will matter more than anything that can be done for him. To the dog or cat who learned as a youngster that a crate is a safe place to be, confinement isn't going to add to the stress. And when a pet goes home with instructions to keep from reinjuring himself, that crate will again protect him from harm.

After your pet is spayed or neutered or undergoes some other surgical procedure, your veterinarian will likely recommend crate rest for a period of days or weeks, depending on the situation. A pet who is already crate-trained will respond much better to this requirement than one who is not.

To make this trying time easier for your pet, keep him occupied with plenty of toys and an occasional low-calorie treat (you don't want him to gain weight during this period of inactivity). You may also want to turn on a radio or television so he has something to listen to or watch; there's even a new TV channel called, "DogTV." Pamper him with daily grooming, which can be a welcome distraction. Also smart:

If you spot an in-house accident, don't punish your pup. Rubbing his nose in the mess is pointless, mean and in fact is counterproductive. If you catch your dog in the act, a stern "no" will suffice, followed by an immediate trip to the yard and praise when he finishes up where he's supposed to. Clean up the mess inside thoroughly, applying an enzymatic solution to the area to neutralize the smell (these products don't just cover up the smell, rather they eliminate the molecules of urine) so your dog won't be tempted to use the same spot again.

keep your pet entertained by placing the crate in a high-traffic area where he can see household activity. If he is easily agitated, however, it may be a better idea to keep the crate in a quiet room.

If your cat has been prescribed crate rest, a large dog crate with a small litter pan inside may provide adequate containment. Just be sure to cover the slippery plastic floor with an inexpensive nonslip rug. You can also put a smaller box inside for the cat to hide out in.



- **Holidays.** During big family gatherings such as Thanksgiving or other events with many guests such as parties or weddings, it's easy for pets to become overwhelmed by the presence of so many strangers and so much going on. They may take the opportunity to steal food that's not meant for them, break house-training under stress, or escape through a door or gate inadvertently left open. The Fourth of July is a very stressful time for many pets and having an escape place that's secluded, safe and secure can literally be a life-saver (this holiday is the No. 1 time pets are lost every year).



The crate to the rescue! Putting your pet in a quiet room with his crate and a couple of favorite toys can prevent the mayhem that occurs when Bernie the Saint Bernard grabs the turkey off the table or Snowflake climbs the Christmas tree because she's being chased by Buster. Keeping pets calm and out of trouble is what crates do best.

- **Travel.** Whether your pet's car trips are simply short jaunts to the veterinary clinic or pet supply store or multiday road trips for a vacation, dog or cat show, or move to a new home, a crate is one of the most important items you can bring. Riding in a crate in the car helps to protect your pet in the event of an accident. If he's riding loose, he could be ejected into traffic or escape in all the hullabaloo. Worse yet, if they're riding in the back of a pickup (which is illegal in some states) or have their head out the window, an insect that hits their eye at 60 mph can cause serious damage or blindness. In any case, the result could be injury or death. Crating your pet in the car protects all the passengers, plus other people on the road. Pets distract drivers, and we all know that distractions can lead to accidents. A few years ago, a driver trying to deal with an

unruly dog in his vehicle veered off the road and nearly killed best-selling author Stephen King. These sorts of accidents happen every day to many less famous people but with no less tragic results.

Even if your dog is well-mannered, he's a distraction while you're driving. A survey of 1,000 drivers by AAA and the pet products manufacturer Kurgo showed that more than half of all drivers admitted they took their hands off the steering wheel to pet their dogs while driving with them in the car. Even worse, a quarter restrained their dogs with their hands when braking. Maybe you're smart enough not to do those things, but you can't mess with physics. In an accident, an unsecured animal can be hurt or killed from being thrown around in or ejected from the car. He'll be lucky to survive even a relatively minor collision.

An unsecured dog or cat can also injure another passenger. Even if your pet isn't harmed while in an accident, he can escape in the aftermath of the crash, when emergency responders are trying to treat victims. So many things can go wrong, and that makes the use of a crate (or seat-belt harness) while traveling a true no-brainer.

Your securely restrained pet should ride in the back seat or cargo area in a crate that is securely fastened either with a seatbelt passed through the top handle (don't ever snap a seatbelt to your dog's collar or harness) or bungee cords attached to tie downs. You'll note I recommend that your pet ride in the back seat; that's because air bags aren't any safer for pets than they are for small children.

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Flying to your destination? Whether traveling in the cabin or in cargo, your pet will need to ride in a crate or carrier. Be sure the carrier you choose is airline-approved. In the cabin, it should fit comfortably beneath the seat with your kitten, cat, puppy or toy-breed dog inside it. If your pet is traveling steorage, er, cargo, he must ride inside a hard plastic crate. To minimize stress, be sure your dog or cat has had at least a month to become familiar with the crate.

The following tips will help ensure that your animal travels safely inside the crate:

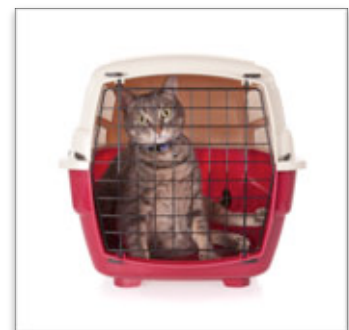
- Ask your veterinarian for products to make the trip easier and safer. Don't use tranquilizers but do use pheromones and products like Anxitane and Thunder Shirts. There is also a product called Cerenia that can be used with great effectiveness to prevent motion sickness.
- Use a permanent marker to write the words "Live Animal" on the crate.
- Attach a label with your name, address and phone number, as well as the name, address and phone number of the pet's destination.
- Affix a current photo of your pet to the top of the crate.
- Make sure your pet has microchip identification and has an ID tag with your mobile phone number and e-mail address.
- Secure the door with tough plastic cable ties to prevent it from popping open in case the crate is dropped.
- Line the bottom of the crate with a towel or other comfortable, absorbent material.
- Trim your pet's nails to ensure that they don't get hooked in the carrier's door, ventilation openings or the fabric of the liner.
- Fill the water dish and freeze it before shipping. The ice will melt slowly and won't spill, ensuring that your pet has access to water for the entire trip.
- Attach a plastic or cloth bag filled with dry food and feeding instructions to the outside of the crate. If the flight is delayed, your pet may need to be fed.

In a hotel room, the crate is your pet's home sweet home. It looks and smells familiar and is a cozy place to rest after a long day of travel. And just like at home, the crate prevents your pet from creating mayhem in the hotel room, saving you from having to pay a hefty fee for cleaning or damage. Use it just as you would at home, placing it beside the bed. Be sure your pet is in the crate when the cleaning people come in or if you must leave the room for a short period.

Emergency evacuation. Crates save lives when disaster strikes. Whether you are facing a fire, flood, earthquake or other disaster, a crate is essential in safely evacuating your pet along with the rest of the family. Dealing with pets in a disaster means putting them in crates so they won't hurt themselves or others while being evacuated or sheltered while awaiting their owners or new homes. Pets who are used to crates will be much better off in these stressful circumstances. And for families who evacuate with their pets, finding emergency lodging is far easier when pets are crated. In a time of crisis, hotels or shelters that usually won't take pets will often accept them if they have a crate in which they can stay.

Crates for cats

While cats don't need a crate for houstraining, a carrier or crate is important for travel and sometimes management. Snowflake will feel more secure in a strange place if she has her familiar crate in which to retreat. Learning to love her carrier at an early age helps ensure that



your cat will willingly ride in the car, whether you're taking her to the veterinarian, on a trip, or to a new home.

Safety is an issue as well. Kittens are right up there with Columbus, Drake and Magellan when it comes to being bold explorers, but the inside of a car is not the best place to let them roam free. For rides to the veterinarian or trips to your winter digs in Palm Springs or summer home at the lake, your kitten or cat should ride safely contained in his very own transporter device, either a hard plastic carrier or a soft-sided model.

Types of crates. Plastic crates are tough, long-lasting and easy to clean if Snowflake hacks up a hairball or lets loose with a spray of urine. The best plastic carriers have doors in the front and the top as many cats have a preference about which way they go into a crate and like to come out of one. Also, get one that splits in half so that when taken to a veterinarian she can just take the top half off like a clamshell and leave the cat in the bottom half of the carrier. Sometimes it's a heckuva lot easier to lift a cat out of



a crate than it is to coax her out of the front of it. Note that airlines generally don't permit the use of crates with top openings, so if Snowflake will be traveling in the cargo area—which we don't recommend—you'll need to select a different style for the trip.

Soft-sided carriers are cozy for cats and easy to carry using a shoulder strap. They are usually made of nylon and can be wiped clean with little effort. If Snowflake will be living a globetrotter lifestyle, a soft-sided carrier fits easily beneath an airline seat, but it can't be used for cats traveling in the

cargo area—and you wouldn't want your cat to go steerage anyway! Choose a soft-sided carrier with zippered top and end closures for ease of removal at your destination. Some soft-sided carriers roll along on wheels, but make sure you get one that's stable and won't tip over with your cat inside. That would be a cat-astrophe! Whichever style you choose, go for high-quality construction, with sturdy latches and smooth edges.

For both types of carriers, put a towel in the bottom as cats like to curl up under it where they feel they can't see or be seen.

Creating a crate-friendly cat. For cats, learning to ride in a carrier is especially important. Many cats don't receive regular veterinary care because it is such a struggle to get them into the car and safely to the veterinary clinic. Some cats just plain disappear when they think a trip to the veterinarian is in the air, causing the appointment to be canceled. If you do get them there, they are stressed and resentful, expressing their unhappiness by scratching, biting or, at best, yowling loudly. A cat who is willing to walk into a carrier and is comfortable staying in it is a cat who is going to be easier to take to the veterinarian or on other

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necessary trips. Teaching a cat to “load up” (get in his carrier) requires a little patience, but it’s well worth the effort. The following tips will help you develop a crate-loving cat in no time.

Start by leaving the carrier out in the open, with the door ajar or unzipped. Most cats are curious—they wouldn’t be cats if they weren’t—and will walk in and explore the carrier on their own. If your cat is on the cautious side, lure him into the carrier with a toy or treat or scratch at it so that he becomes intrigued by the sound. If all else fails, bait it with catnip. Whenever your kitten or cat gets into the carrier on her own, give her a treat. For the not-so-curious kitty, reward even small movements into the carrier, using a clicker and treats. If he puts his head or paw in, click and treat. Gradually require him to step in further before he gets the click and treat: two paws, three paws, all four paws. It’s easy to become impatient, waiting for the cat to offer the behavior you want, but keep at it. Even if you don’t see him go inside the carrier, reward him any time you see him inside it.

You want the cat to learn that something good happens every time he goes in the carrier. Other ways to encourage the cat to go into the carrier are to put his meals inside it or to toss treats in it once a day so he has to go in and get them. Right before bed is a good time to do that.

Soon your cat will go in the crate willingly. When this happens, add a verbal cue such as “load up” or even just “in.” It’s great if your cat enjoys going into the carrier, but you want to associate a word or phrase with it so he’ll do it in a hurry if necessary.



Keep the door open in the beginning. As your cat gets used to the crate, shut the door for short intervals. Once your kitten or cat is okay with being in the crate with the door closed, pick the carrier up gently so your feline friend can get used to the sensation of movement. Again, treats and praise will go a long way toward helping this process along.

The use of synthetic pheromones can also help to calm skittish cats. These particular pheromones are chemicals that mimic the feline cheek pheromone, which is what a cat rubs against furniture or you to mark it as safe and approved..

They are widely available and can be sprayed on a towel that is then placed in the carrier.

The next step is to take your cat on a short car-ride. At first, simply back out of the driveway, then pull back in. Gradually increase the length of these car rides to nowhere. Place a towel over the carrier to reduce potentially alarming visual input. If possible, use seatbelts to strap the carrier into place and help minimize jostling.

Taking your cat somewhere. Once your cat is used to her carrier, take her out in it on a regular basis, not just to the veterinarian. Errands such as going to the drive-through bank teller, dropping off the dry cleaning or getting an ice cream cone are ideal. This will instill the

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idea that car rides are not such a bad thing, especially if your cat gets to lick the last bit of ice cream out of the cone. Also, take your cat to the vet for a visit and treats with no exam or procedures. Then she'll view the trip to the vet as one of pleasure, not pain.

When you do go to the veterinarian or plan to stay at a hotel or other unfamiliar place with your cat, place a blanket or towel from home inside the carrier. The scent will provide your cat some comfort in the strange place.

Withhold a meal or feed a little less before you leave. If you don't feed your cat before the car ride, she'll be less prone to motion sickness. And if she's a little hungry, your cat might be more willing to come out of her carrier when the veterinarian offers a treat, making the visit more enjoyable for everyone.

At the veterinary clinic, give your cat time to adjust to being in the exam room. Remove the top or open the door of the carrier. If the cat can remain in the bottom half of the carrier for as much of the exam as possible, so much the better. This allows her to deal with the encounter from what she considers a safe place.

The more your kitten learns to enjoy the carrier, the easier it will be to secure your cat for travel in the future. Don't worry that getting your cat to go in the carrier and then taking her to the veterinarian will sour her on the experience. If you play your cards right, your cat will get treats for going into the carrier a lot more often than she will have a bad experience at the veterinarian. There are 365 days in a year. If your cat gets in the carrier and something good happens on most of those days, she's not going to worry too much about the two days that she got in the carrier and something happened that she didn't like. Cats know when the odds are to their advantage.

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