

Modern Natural Rearing: The Environment

*Image: "A*starz Kennel"
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Kennel Environment



If you have multiple dogs, a kennel setup is something to seriously consider. It will enable you to have a place at home to keep your pets where they are secure, healthy and can feel comfortable in. You can leave them there while you are away at work and they can romp, get fresh air and defecate. You can keep the area clean and pest free through proper management. It is easier to find someone to pet sit for you if you have a kennel set up because it is easier for them to come in and take care of everyone. If you are raising puppies or have a stud dog who may have bitches visiting, a secure kennel is important to their health and happiness.

When you go to visit other folks' home that boast they are big breeders, consider how their dogs are kept day to day. Are the in crates in the garage or house? How comfortable is that? How much exercise do they (honestly) get? Are they kennel dog in that they don't get to mingle at all in a home environment?

Just how many dogs do these big breeders keep and how can they give them all proper attention (training, love time, grooming....)? The answers to these questions are important to know as it applies to your next family member.

Although we have a kennel, all our dogs are raised in the home and crate trained. We rotate everyone so they all get some house time, but we rarely have all five dogs in at one time. (Our personal dog limit is five.)

A Kennel

My first introduction to "kennels" was not a positive one. In my almost 30yrs around dogs and dog people, I have had the opportunity to visit many kennels, Kees, Collies, Shelties, etc. There are some I have visited and obtained good ideas from in future planning. Many kennels are not pretty sights. They stink, they are an eyesore and many look unsanitary. That does not have to be the case and should not be the norm. As breeders of quality kees, we should think about the impression our home and dog areas have upon folks that come to visit, come to purchase a puppy or adopt a rescue dog. We should set an example and not be talked about as "that dog house". I am not saying that my setup is perfect and that my home is always in order, but I have had compliments that it is one of the best set ups for the dogs and there are not tumbleweeds of dog hair in the corners of my home.

Kennel Construction

To introduce the kennel idea, I will explain my kennel set up as there are many styles to suit different needs and areas of the country. I am very proud of my kennel as it is a showcase for us as well as being a healthy and secure place for our dogs. It has made our life easier and allows us the freedom to stash our dogs without them having to be inconvenienced or uncomfortable.

I had my first kennel in Ohio around 1985. I put up most of the fencing myself. My brother-in-law, Jeff Woods, designed and built the inside.

Our current kennel in Maryland was based upon this design, however, it needed many new innovations because it is on the side of a mountain where nothing is level and there is much stone beneath the surface. My husband, Lem, designed this kennel so it would be level. It took 40 tons of dirt and a lot of sweat to get it right. His ideas along with tips I had received during the years from talking with other folks who have kennels went into the design.



Our kennel is located within earshot and view of our master bedroom and deck. (No, our dogs are not debarked, we like their voices but they are semi-trained to be quiet!) The building is 12'x24'. It is not heated or air conditioned and we don't have plumbing in it. There is an area for grooming and storing crates, x-pens, etc. It has four indoor/outdoor runs and four inside-only boxes. All inside boxes are 3'x3' with removable floors raised off the ground about 6". This keeps the dogs from having drafty floors to sleep on. The dividers are turkey wire (2"x4" square mesh fencing) with wood (2"x4" pieces) and tops that are covered and hinged. The front doors are solid wood with horse stable latches. I use Johnson Pet Doors, large size flexible rubber, for the indoor/outdoor openings.

To maintain the inside, I use a shop vacuum several times during major cleaning. This picks up cobwebs, critters, flea eggs that may have been carried in and dog hair from accumulating. I wash all the bedding periodically (more often in summer time). If I do have a potential pest problem, diatomaceous earth can be sprinkled around to kill fleas and ticks. It is not a chemical and is safe around dogs. Using citronella, penny royal, eucalyptus oils in a water base sprayer can also add to repelling pests in a natural way.

The outside runs are 6' high and 6'x18' chain link panels. The runs are completely under a wooden roof structure (uses 6"x6" wood beams for supports) with metal finishing to keep snow, rain, ticks and sticks out. There are full length gates on each run for easy access. We keep snap clips on each door latch in case a clever kees learns to pop the latch by jumping up. (That has happened.) For summer when the sun tends to intrude into the runs, we have three foot wide roll down shades to provide protection. Kees coats can turn red if bleached by the sun, so the shades are helpful to prevent this. There is a light above each outside kennel run as well as lights inside the building. Both sets are turned on by light switches. The two outdoor flood lights are on timers that go from dark to midnight.



There is a radio inside the building that is on a timer from approx 7am-midnight. It serves two purposes:
 1) so the dogs can hear noise and voices
 2) so would-be intruders think someone is inside

During the winter, we add nice, thick bedding. In the summer, there is nothing down except a light bedding. I have recently discontinued the use of cedar chips because they have such a strong odor and most dogs are allergic to them. They also tend to stain the light color legs of kees.

In addition to the above, we used landscaping timbers as outlines to each outside run. They are built up so each run is on level ground. The inside of the timbers (stacked 12 high in places, are notched for stability) are filled with dirt. Turkey wire is laid next to prevent diggers from mixing dirt & gravel. I found that to be a problem with my first kennel. Kees love to dig and will eventually get to the dirt layer. Things become messy then. That is followed by 8" of limestone gravel and topped off with 6" of rolled pea gravel. Limestone gravel is good to wash stuff into because it is a natural scent diffuser. The importance of a good layer of gravel is key to keeping worms under control. If you show dogs or have other dogs visit your kennel, you will inevitably get worms. You can disinfect and hose down gravel very easily and keep worms away from your dogs foot pads to prevent reinfestation. I use Lysol cleaner, Quatricide and KenCare for disinfecting. I use a power nozzle to wash away stuff after scooping. I like to disinfect about once a week. If you have bitches in heat, hosing the run down will keep the scents under control. Every quarter or so, a run is "retired" and limestone powder (the sweet kind, also known as Garden Lime) is spread over it for a week. This helps break down organic matter and diffuse smells.

In each run, there is usually only one dog at a time, two sometimes. Scooping once or twice a day is done with the scoops being put in a large rubber trashcan that is dumped every few weeks into a hole and filled over. In talking to others that have a kennel set up, we often ask what is done with the fecal matter. Many put it in a plastic bag and it goes out with the trash. I guess this would be ok if you have one or two dogs, but more than that and the trash collectors may not take it. I have used a "pit" at my old place in Ohio, but the ground was low and when it rained... well it wasn't a pretty or sanitary sight. We have three acres and can find places "in the back" to dig up as disposal areas. Lime powder expedites the breakdown process.

Kennel Exercise



For exercise and security from other animals, our kennel is situated in the middle of a 1/4 acre of fenced area. We call this the "dog compound". There is one main gate.

Since we are on a sloping mountain, we could not fence flush with the ground. We used boulder, stones and timber to fill in the "holes". The compound has been secure after the first year or two. It required some expert escape artists (mainly Lexy & Ketta) to show us the areas we had not known were a problem. Our dogs are only allowed in the compound when we are home. This is a security measure in case a clever kees finds a new opening! The compound does have some grass, but is mostly hard packed dirt and stone. It drains very well even after major downpours. We

keep the grass clipped short with just enough clumps left for the kees to munch on. We also keep the low tree branches trimmed.

Sometimes we have to spray liquid Sevin during pest season. These measures keep ticks and fleas from becoming too comfortable. When we have a bitch in heat, she is only let out on lead to exercise outside the compound. Keeping her in a run within the compound keeps her secure from stray dogs. The "bitch in heat" run is the last run, the highest elevated from the ground. The "stud dog run" is the lowest, opposite the bitch run and is downwind from it.

The dog compound has many fun areas for kees to explore. We have boulders and timbers around as well as a large open area for serious romping. Because of this and the slope, our dogs have great muscle tone. It shows in their ability to leap high, perform agility, lasting endurance and deliver healthy puppies in no time flat. Muscle tone is important to keep other organs and bones in good working order. It also keeps our old guy and gals young and in good shape to live longer.

Kennel Socializing



Socialization is another important aspect of the dog compound. In it, we mix various personalities and ages. There is a pack instinct that is a natural part of the interaction. It is important to allow the dogs to find their rung in the pack. It is good for their overall mental attitude and "doggy relations". Little or no interaction from us is usually needed for everyone to find their spot. It is interesting to watch.

When we sit for other dogs or temporarily add a rescue dog, we monitor the pack carefully as the new dog finds its place. Dogs need interaction with one another (as well as with people) to keep their minds stable. Just think what the world would be like if you were the only human in the midst of other creatures or if you were not allowed to mix with other humans.

Kennel Care through the Seasons

Our kennel is in the woods but there are several sunny spots even during peak tree leaf time. Even though some sunshine is a good source of Vitamin A, too much will turn a kees coat red and brittle. In the early spring when the trees and bushes haven't grown out yet, we use rollup blinds on the gates to each dog run to keep the runs shady. The temperature stays very cool in the shade of the trees during most of the summer.

In the hot summer, we only let the dogs run in the very late evening. We have fans on each run inside to help circulate the air and provide a more cooling effect. In the winter, if the temperature falls below zero, we bring the dogs in the house. Otherwise, we keep those who are being conditioned for show outside to grow nice, plush coats. Jerking them from a 70 degree house back and forth to 20-40 degree weather is not healthy. Several years ago, we invested in "Canine Canteen" water buckets. They hold 5 gallons of water and keep it from freezing but at a nice temperature for drinking. We have since gone to stainless steel water bowls that plug in. They hold about 3 gallons of water. They are electric and plug in. They have about 3 feet of protected wire that can be woven up and out of reach of knawers into chain link. They cost about \$40 each, but the investment was well worth it. The dogs now have good, clean, unfrozen spring water all year long. [These buckets are available via catalogs; see the Reference section.]



Landscaping

In addition to the functionality of a kennel, we also landscape the outside to make it more appealing as well as functional. The use of plants around the kennel make it more pleasing to our eyes and healthier for the dogs. We planted garlic, marigolds, (various) mint and boxwood around the dog compound. The

plants are suppose to discourage pests and they are ornamental. In the spring, tulips, daffodils, windflowers, various mints and marigolds decorate the perimeter.

I hope the explanations of our set up has given you ideas for planning or improving your own in a more natural way.

Dog Care

Care of the dogs was covered in preceding topics of MNR, however, some generalities will be touched on. It is very important to establish a relationship with a good veterinarian. When I lived in Ohio, I eventually ended up with two excellent vets. It was hard to leave them in 1989 when I moved to Maryland, but it was even more difficult to find replacements. We have used several vets in the Frederick Maryland area, and still have not settled on one. Like the area we live in, our vets are transient as well and it is hard to find one vet that remains constant and up to date on the latest on purebred dogs. We strive to find a good vet who knows breeders and the trials & tribulations of working with purebreds.



Prevention is important using a good dog food along with a vitamin and herb supplement that is tailored to your dog lifestyle and needs. (These topics were covered in previous articles.) Be careful with the overuse of drugs. They should be used only with consultation with your vet. The use of cortisone for common ailments such as skin allergies is becoming more and more common. Avoid them if possible because they suppress the immune system. There are other avenues. Try using more natural, slower working methods, most of which are preventative.

If your dog does develop a life-threatening problem where massive surgery is suggested, you must weigh that along with the chances of a quality life. Sometimes vets are overly optimistic or they don't explain the best and worse case. Life at any cost and heroics are not the answer. Choices made in these situations sometimes result in your dog having a (much) less than ideal quality of life. Many an owner has had to make the fateful decision of euthanasia after one or two such surgeries and much pain for the pet, not to mention the strain on the family and pocket book. If you have a vet you can trust who will level with you, the decisions will be easier and better for everyone involved.

If the choice is to euthanize, the best thing you can do is to be there when it happens, to say goodbye to your pet who loved you and trusted you to act in his best interest.



Unless your dog has an illness that requires intensive care you cannot give at home, it is best to treat your dog at home. This is assuming you have a crate, because most illnesses require rest and quiet. This can only be achieved successfully with the use of a crate. There have been times in the past that I thought I could not do things like giving shots, but I learned to because my dog needed such care to live. When your pet needs it, you will forget about your queasy stomach, about your quirks and you will do what is necessary. That is just the way it is. If you have found a good veterinarian, you will be able to work with them on a schedule that will have your dog on the road to a quick recovery.

Many liver and kidney failure cases are due to the toxic effects of food and the environment. You can help alleviate some of this through a good health program that includes Vitamin C. Diseases of the heart and circulatory system can also be kept to a minimum with the same and the use of garlic and proper exercise. Keeping your dog in good physical shape is important for long life.

Nutrition

Nutrition and feeding were covered in previous articles, geared towards each type of dog. To review in general terms, important points are to keep your dog on a schedule of feeding. For an average dog in

good health, one meal a day is best for the optimum utilization of food. The meal should be given at approximately the same time each day. What is not eaten in thirty minutes should be taken away until the next day.

A good quality meat based food with natural preservatives is best. Recipes for dog stew, cupcakes and crunchies were contained in previous articles as well as book suggestions for more recipes. The best scenario is to cook for your dog, but most people don't have the time to do this if they have multiple pets and work. What I use is Natural Life Condition formula mixed with at least one other good quality food (rotated) such as Natures Recipe. I like to use a meat-based foundation, a fish-based mixer (great for Nordic breeds) and a Bison or Venison mixer. I don't use lamb based foods. I cook and then freeze A*starz Dog Stew and cupcakes to keep on hand during the month. These are added to the dry food and vitamin & herbal supplements. Puppies are raised on mostly homemade foods and Precise Puppy formula. Older puppies and special care dogs get 1/2 their meals as Chipper's Favorite Cupcakes. (See RECIPES in the LINKS section at the end of the article.)

For those of you who are vegetarians, do not expect your dog to do well on a vegetarian diet for any length of time. Dogs are carnivores and require meat in their diet. They cannot be healthy and happy on such a diet.

Keeshonds should be allowed to each grass when they want and some will even eat dirt. This is ok as they are attempting to add minerals and greens to their diet. Some will eat sticks but not all the ones they chew have medicinal value.

The Future



The idea behind "Modern Natural Rearing" is to be able to produce healthier, solid (mind & body) kees over time. It will not be in our lifetime ... it will take generations. I am not doing all I could do as it takes time to get on a program, but I am doing what I can within the limits of my lifestyle. If we, as concerned futuristic-Kees folks, do what we can, the future of our breed will be more assured. Are you short term or long term?

Are you part of the future or a contributor to the demise of the breed? If we don't get a group of serious folks to participate, our breed will suffer. I have been seeking out folks with similar concerns who want to make a difference. There will come a day

when serious kees folk will only breed and obtain dogs from others who have a holistic approach. It is already starting to happen. I am excited about the future of our breed in that respect.

Invitation

Residing in the Washington D.C. area, we have been fortunate to have kees-fancier visitors stop by. We have entertained friends from different parts of the country and world. We invite any of our kees friends who are traveling far from home to visit us. Please call/email beforehand to make sure we are going to be around!



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