Building a Malamute Proof Kennel

by Paul R. Ganci, Ph.D.

So you want a malamute proof enclosure? Are you wondering just how to go about building one, or without it costing an arm and leg? Well, I hope this article will give you some ideas on how to build your own luxury malamute enclosure. But first I am sure you are wondering what are my qualifications? After all, we have all probably had to deal with that very special malamute who can escape anything. Well, no malamute could escape like my Keela, so aptly nicknamed "The Fiend" by Susan Conant.

Keela possesses an uncanny ability to elude all barriers. She first made me aware of her talents as I arrived home from work and she greeted me at my car door. Now when I left to go to work, Keela was safely inside the house. To my surprise she had head butted a window, shattering it, and then leaped to her freedom. So I boarded up the window and attempted to create an impenetrable room. Keela proceeded to attack the exterior door the very next day. She peeled back the sheet metal as if it were a sardine can and, once the inner layer of sheet metal was out of the way, tore out the insulation exposing the outer layer of sheet metal. Keela nearly had that pushed out, and certainly would have had her freedom, if my wife did not get home in time to catch her. She must have worked on the door all day long in order to get as far as she did. However, the kicker was when I boarded Keela at a kennel for safety reasons while I constructed my first semi-malamute proof enclosure. The kennel staff made the mistake of placing Keela in a Plexiglas enclosure. One good malamute head butt later, and Keela was loose in the kennel terrorizing both kennel worker and canine alike!



Figure 1. Keela's First Kennel with Interleaved Reinforcement Bar Added at Bottom of Chain Link for Strength.

The first requirement when planning a dog kennel is to figure out where you are going to place it. Do a site survey and try to pick natural barriers which you can utilize as kennel sides. These barriers are man made or natural impediments such as a house or existing mountainside. Even a malamute cannot dig far enough down to tunnel underneath a house basement! Second, decide how much you want to spend. I purchased my first 6'×12'×6' enclosure (seen in Figure 1) from a fence company. After modifications, this kennel cost approximately $600 and served admirably until our move to Colorado. Here I own a house in the mountains and utilized the mountainside, house, and deck to create a luxurious and escape proof malamute home.

I purchased the first kennel from a New Hampshire fence company because, at that time, I was renting the house in which I was living and did not want to spend a lot of money on a custom kennel run. A fence company will work with you on creating a kennel of any desired size. I recommend that you stay away from some of the cheaper kennel structures you find at Home Depot and the like. These enclosures are very weak. The tubular framework, which is often made of aluminum, can easily be bent allowing openings for malamutes to escape. In addition, the chain link fabric is often of a high gauge (the higher the gauge the thinner the chain link), which again can easily be bent, chewed and broken by a persistent malamute. I suggest a minimum of 6-gauge chain link be used in combination with a strong tubular steel framework in any kennel. Such an enclosure can be purchased from any fence company and at a reasonable price. This will provide a basis for the modifications suggested next.

Once you choose the basic kennel, you will want to perform some modifications in order to fortify it against malamute attack. The existing chain link fabric attaches to the tubular kennel frame by twisted metal wires. A persevering malamute will pull at the chain link until either the fabric becomes badly distorted, or until the wire tie fails completely. In this event your malamute creates a handy escape opening at the bottom of the enclosure. I recommend you interweave a piece of reinforcement rod into the chain link fabric along the length of the kennel. I did this to mine as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 2. Keela's Battered Kennel Gate Showing Re-bar Repair Work. Note the clip in the gate latch to prevent a clever malamute from pushing the latch open with her nose!

Now when your malamute pulls at the chain link, the whole fence gives as opposed to just a localized area. I called this kennel my first semi-malamute proof enclosure because Keela still chewed her way out of it. Note the disfigured chain link in the gate in Figure 2. You can also see the reinforcement rod repairs to the openings created by Keela's multiple escapes!

As anyone who owns a malamute knows, they are prolific diggers and can be halfway to China before you know it. I placed my kennel on concrete since I do not know of any malamute capable of digging through this hardy material. If this solution is impractical, burying chicken wire underneath a gravel kennel floor may prevent a digging malamute from reaching freedom. I personally rejected the gravel covered chicken wire floor solution as Keela could chew off pieces of the stronger chain link fence.

Finally you should take precautions against climbing and leaping malamutes. When I adopted Keela I was warned she was capable of leaping out of a 6' tall kennel. So I added a 2' tall plywood box-like addition to the top of this kennel (unfortunately not shown) to prevent Keela from jumping out. The addition rested on top of the tubular kennel frame and was tied down by wire. If you have a leaper, then I advise that you utilize 8' tall chain link sides if you do not want to mess with a roof or addition like I described.



Figure 3. Nanuk in His Colorado Kennel Run. Note the use of "natural barriers" as kennel sides, namely the retaining wall on right (east) and the house on left (west).

Once we moved to Colorado, I used the knowledge gained from the first enclosure to create a 65'×15' kennel run complete with doggy condos. My present home is located at 8400 feet on a mountainside. The long side of the house runs parallel to a retaining wall, which holds back loose gravel and rock and once was home to my wife's garden. I used the side of the house and the retaining wall as two sides of the kennel (seen in Figure 3). There is only an 8' tall cedar fence on top of the retaining wall to defend against a leaping malamute. But the retaining wall is made of railroad ties, which are impervious to attacking malamutes, and any digging malamutes eventually find only granite bedrock.



Figure 4. North Kennel End Fence and Gate.

I closed off the far north end of the kennel with a combination chain link and cedar fence with gate (Figure 4). The chain link fence is 6' tall and attached to 4"×4" cedar deck support posts which are mounted in concrete in the ground. I bolted the loose ends of the chain link fence and gate to the supporting posts using cedar 2"×4"s to prevent damage from a pulling malamute. I also poured a concrete footer, which goes down to the granite bedrock below the fence and covers the whole fence length. I added an 8' tall exterior cedar fence for aesthetic reasons and to provide added defense against climbing or leaping malamutes. Finally, note the dual split latches on the gate. These latches open one side at a time, preventing a malamute from using her nose to push the latch up and at the same time push the gate open. Clips are not really necessary because there are two latches. I still keep a clip in the top latch, just to insure at least one latch is impossible to push upwards and open.

At the south end of the kennel is one of my home's decks, beneath which I built two large doggy condos (Figure 5). Again I poured a concrete footer, which goes down to the granite bedrock and runs the length of the condos. The footer serves as the condo foundation as well as an escape barrier against digging malamutes. I insulated the condos on all sides, top, and bottom with 2-inch Styrofoam. I covered the outside with cedar siding purely for aesthetic purposes and made the roof of tin only to keep water from dripping into the condos. The deck itself serves to support the weight of snow during the winter.

The fence and gate on the house side provide access to the deck from the kennel area. Again all chain link fence is 6' tall and all cedar fence 8' tall, and a concrete footer runs the full fence length. I utilized the deck railing as part of the kennel sides. Since the doggy condos are already 4' tall, my malamutes cannot get out by leaping onto the deck due to the railing defense. Fortunately my malamutes cannot easily attack the railing, potentially tearing it down and creating a leap able escape route.



Figure 5. South Kennel End Doggy Condos, Fence and Gate.



Figure 6. The Doggy Condo Backside Showing Tin Roof, Cedar Siding and Chain Link Fencing.

The backside of the doggy condos can be seen in Figure 6. I sided the condos with cedar plywood in order to protect the insulation. In addition, I surrounded the condo with chain link fence. This fencing provides two critical functions. First, it presents another barrier should my malamutes find a way to create an opening in their doghouse walls. Second, it keeps the bears away from the siding and effectively prevents them from clawing the cedar plywood or ruining the condos!

The total cost of materials for Keela's and Nanuk's kennel run was $2003.00. Half of the expense was due to the cost of cedar, which I used in order to maintain a minimum level of aesthetic beauty with the house. The remainder of the building material costs resulted from efforts to secure the kennel from malamute breakouts. This cost includes hardware (nuts, bolts and screws), chain link fencing, gates and latches, posts, and concrete. By utilizing the natural barriers provided by the house and mountainside, I not only saved money in my construction costs, but I also created a secure malamute proof enclosure. The kennel looks good, is quite functional, and is one my malamutes enjoy. In fact, my malamutes like it so much they don't try to escape any more!

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