

# Dog Enrichment

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## Introduction

Enrichment is about making changes to an animal's environment to encourage species specific behaviours and keep our wonderful hounds happy and contented. Enrichment should be a part of our dogs daily lifestyle. What works for one animal may not be appropriate for another due to Physical ability, any medical conditions and each breed and individual engage in different types of behaviour naturally.



For dogs we might look at providing opportunities to chew, run, sniff, rip, hunt, dig (sandpits and paddling pools) and to be social with other dogs and you doing clicker or trick training and just being together. Food and scavenge activities is the most common opportunity and could include feeding wet food off, lick mats, feeding dry food from snax mats, scatter feeding around the garden, scatter feeding around the house, stuffed Kongs, stuffed Kong bones, shredded paper treat hunt, plastic bottles with treats or food in (tops removed), cardboard boxes, stuffed Kong in a cardboard box, pass the parcel - boxes within boxes each one containing different treats, frozen treats and find the Spratt.

Living in a home environment most dogs have the opportunity for regular walks and play time with their people. However even with

the best of intentions, our modern busy lifestyles mean that often we do not provide the level of activity and mental stimulation that they need. The good news is that with a little forethought and planning even the busiest of households can enjoy a contented canine. The more opportunities you can provide for your dog to be a dog, the happier he will be. Bored dogs tend to go self-employed making their own fun and not normally in ways you or I would approve of. We can look to provide enrichment in our everyday activities with our dog:

## Exercise

Lead walks are a great brainteaser thanks to all the sensory information dogs get from them, but they don't really count as aerobic exercise for most dogs. Just like us your dog needs to run, swim, or do something else that gets

his heart pumping for at least 30 minutes every day. Swimming, in open water or at a dedicated pool or hydrotherapy centre for dogs can provide intense physical exercise without concussion on joints. Check with your vet first as there are some physical conditions for which swimming is not appropriate.

## Off Lead Hikes

Spend some time communing with nature. Don't spend your time on the phone while throwing a ball mindlessly. Enjoy the outdoors, let your dog wander and sniff to his heart's content. Go one step further and allow your dog to set the route and follow him for a change. Notice things your dog might be interested in and point them out to your dog – maybe there's a fallen tree that he might like to investigate, a pond for a paddle. Go one step further and scatter treats in areas when your dog





isn't looking and then direct him to go search, or squish some cheese on tree trunks and encourage him to discover the hidden delights. This also helps teach your dog that it's a good idea to pay attention to you when out as you seem to know where all the good stuff can be found.

## Toys

Toys are a great way to engage your dog's brain. Dogs have distinctly individual toy preferences and these can change depending on the day, time and situation. Do some detective work and find out what truly gets your dog going. The best toys have a purpose. They deliver food, present a challenge, squeak, or make themselves interesting in some other way. Once you have a good selection, develop a toy strategy. You might want to consider keeping some popular toys aside for use when you will be leaving your dog alone, or confined in anyway. Rotate the other toys on a regular basis to keep the novelty

factor high; dogs will get bored if presented with the same toys day on day. Change them around every few days so there is always something new to investigate.

Playing tug with you can provide a good workout for both of you, and with rules in place can help teach self-control too. Keep sessions intense and short and let your dog win often! Don't worry it won't make him dominant, but it will make him much more likely to want to play with you in the future; no one likes playing a game that they never win.

## Chewing

Chewing is all about toning jaw muscles, dogs may no longer need to split bones and grind down marrow to survive, but the urge is hardwired into them. Some dogs live to chew; others can take it or leave it. How often dogs chew and what they chew is down to individual taste. There are a wide variety of options available. Edible things like pigs ears or bully

sticks; Non-edibles like rubber toys, Nylabones or Kongs; Things to dissect like soft/plush toys or rope toys; Puzzle toys like stuffed Kongs, treat balls or stuffed bones. Experiment to discover what your dog prefers. Always have a mixed selection at hand and rotate different types of chew items to keep your dog interested.

## Food Delivery Scentwork

Ditch the food bowl and let your dog work to eat. Your dog is not biologically set up to have a bowl of dried food plonked down in front of him. He is a hunter by nature, meant to work for his food. You can mimic this by serving your dog's food in a food dispensing toy like a Kong or treat ball, or you can use empty plastic bottles, cardboard boxes with treats wrapped inside toilet roll tubes or similar. Your dog will spend part of his day figuring out how to get at his food, and then recovering from the mental effort—perfect! Or use some of his daily rations for training, either for behaviours that you'd really like to perfect such as walking on a loose lead, recall, being quiet when the doorbell rings etc. or just some fun tricks.

Spending time training your dog not only produces a better behaved companion it also builds the relationship between you. Dogs have a large part of their brains dedicated to scent detection, and they just love to sniff! There are many ways to capitalise on dogs' scent capabilities with various classes and workshops to teach more formal methods of different kinds of searching. It doesn't have to be complicated - you can keep it simple by just hiding treats or toys around the house and encouraging





your dog to find them. You could even just scatter treats or his dried food on the lawn and let him hunt, or if it's wet (or you don't have a lawn) use a snuffle mat to hide food in; great to do for breakfast while you get ready for your day.

### Other Possibilities

If you don't fancy having a permanent spot for digging you could use a ball pit every now and then instead. Scatter some treats or your dog's dinner and let him hunt around the coloured balls. When it's hot many dogs appreciate cooling down in a paddling pool, but if you don't have the room, just a large tub or tray for splashing in can work, how about trying out bobbing for apples - but substitute toys or chews for apples. Or you can make ice lollies for your dog to enjoy outside. Use some cleaned yogurt pots, pop a few treats mixed with just plain water, or broth or even the yogurt and then freeze and let your dog enjoy a cool treat.

Dogs are meant to be active and there is so much they can turn their paw to. You could try, flyball, agility, obedience, rally, scent-work, tracking, gundog work, or just see what your local club/trainer has available. You might both come to love it and the social aspect can be great for both of you. Think about what your dog was originally bred to do and then see if you can mimic that kind of behaviour with your own games and fun. Your dog will love you for it.



### Sensory Garden

Ok this one might not be so quick and easy to do but it also doesn't have to be terribly complicated either. Create an area in your garden specifically for your dog to explore. Include things that

encourage exploration and investigation. An area with some herbs and plants with your dog in mind - try valerian, hops, wheat or barley grass. Logs to climb over, or tree stumps with knooks and crannies that might hide goodies occasionally.



A platform to lie on and survey their kingdom, a sandpit or area for digging - where occasionally you also hide some toys for them to uncover, a natural tunnel formed from willow, or old tyres or even just a patch of bamboo for your dog to explore and push his way through. You could hang windchimes, ribbons, CDs or even old socks for extra sensory stimulation. Or maybe even include a water feature - a small running stream or a fountain for your dog to enjoy. Be creative to entice all of your dog's senses - smell, touch, taste, seeing and hearing.