

ENRICHMENT

Providing dogs with outlets for their natural behaviors is not only enjoyable, but crucial to their well-being. There has been a recent explosion of enrichment product and ideas. And with a little creativity, you can make your own on any budget!

WORK-TO-EAT AND PUZZLE TOYS

Work-to-eat toys come in many forms, from stuffable Kongs to Nina Ottoson puzzle toys.

Dogs actually enjoy working for their food so it is an option to use these toys both for extras and for entire meal rations. For kibble-fed dogs, the best options are the Planet Dog Snoop, Petsafe Tug-A-Jug and OmegaPaw Treat Ball.



SCENT GAMES

Dogs' noses are truly incredible. Put your dog's nose to work by "scatter feeding" him. Hide kibble and treats throughout the house, throw it in the grass in the yard, or put it under one of several boxes. Sports like K9 Nosework are great fun, teaching your dog to discriminate and identify odors in order to be rewarded.

While we are talking about noses, don't forget the value of letting your dog sniff on walks. Dogs love going on "sniffari": checking out the neighborhood with their noses. Bushes, lampposts, mailboxes and meeting other dogs are vital ways for dogs to enjoy their "dogness." Allowing dogs the chance to explore the world with their powerful olfactory sense is one of the most enriching activities we can provide.

DIY OPTIONS

Enrichment needn't be expensive. You can make simple toys for your dog at home. Sprinkle treats into drink trays and then cover with tennis balls. Make "snuffle mats" with strips of fleece or tee shirts laced into a rubber mat. Then sprinkle with kibble. The humble tennis ball takes on new life when wrapped in an old sock. Tug toys can be made from strips of old tee shirts. For extra fun, insert hard treats between the braids!

Thinking of enrichment as not something "extra" we provide for our dogs, but as a necessary part of their mental health, reduces behavior problems, relinquishment to shelters, and improves quality of life.

PLUSH TOYS AND TUG TOYS

Plush toys and tug toys allow dogs the chance to engage in the behaviors of chasing, catching and dissecting prey. Though many people find this distasteful, this "software" is already installed in many dogs, so giving them a legal outlet to release these behaviors increases behavioral wellness and burns energy. Rules for tug games can be easily established, and give us the opportunity to build in some impulse control at the same time.

NYLON BONES, ANTLER AND CHEW OBJECTS

Chewing is a very natural behavior for dogs. Chewing of inappropriate objects is one of the most common complaints brought to trainers. Luckily, there are now many chew toy options on the market, from synthetics like nylon bones to organics such as bully sticks, raw or smoked bones and antlers. Speak to your veterinarian to find out which are safe for your dog, and then explore which textures, shapes and tastes your dog most likes.

