

Enrich your relationship with your dog!

Opportunity Barks Behavior & Training

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If you've ever seen the animals fed at the National Zoo, you may see the walrus do tricks to earn his fish and see fruits and veggies hanging from string for the monkeys. Or, it's frozen fish pops for the river otters...and that's enrichment! The Smithsonian National Zoo defines enrichment as "the process of providing stimulating environments for animals in order for them to demonstrate their species-typical behavior, to allow them exercise control or choice over their environment, and to enhance their well-being."

Now let's take a look at the domestic dog- fed from bowls 1-3 times a day, toys freely available on the floor...most dogs do hardly anything to earn these items.

Using food related enrichment and training with your dog is a huge opportunity to increase their mental and physical stimulation, and keep them busy. So how do you enrich your dog's life?

Stuff it!

Kong or Squirrel Dude

If you've got hollow chew toys, start stuffin'. The "Kong" and the "Busy Buddy Squirrel Dude" are perfect toys, which are meant to be stuffed. The toys are hollow and can be filled with kibble with a little peanut butter, biscuits, squeeze cheese or cream cheese. The point is, if your dog is a food hound, he'll love licking and you'll love that he's exercising those jaws on a toy, and not your couch. Marrowbones are also great for stuffing with a smear of peanut butter or cream cheese to get your dog munching.

QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

No Such Thing as a Free Lunch

Giving your dog their food each day in a bowl is how most dogs are fed. And, if you're off to work or come home to an energetic dog, I highly recommend that you feed your dog from toys instead. So, rather than having the food gobbled from the bowl or ignored, you can make eating an interactive game that uses brain power and gets your dog working.

Let the Good Times Roll!

There are several toys on the market that allow you to fill them with kibble and then dog must roll or push the object to get the kibble. Here are a few I recommend.

Busy Dog Ball Toys

These clear plastic balls allow the dog to see the kibble and there are two holes that dispense the food. A couple pushes of the nose and your pup gets some kibble.

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TreatStik

This flashlight shaped toy is easy to fill; in fact the toy itself can be used to scoop food from a container. Then, just screw on the end and your dog will start rolling.
All of the above toys are available for purchase on www.cleanrun.com, under interactive toys.

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Home Made Toys

There are also several ways to make your own enrichment toys. One of my favorites is to use an empty food box- a box from a microwave meal or a cereal box. Simply toss a few pieces of food in the box- cheese, hotdogs, something really good. Then fold down the end and let Fido tear that box to get to the food. It's fun and very satisfying for dogs to shred and tear, he'll love it.

Water bottles, 2 liter bottles or empty coffee cans also make great toys.
Drop a few pieces of good food in the water bottle, screw on the lid (or not), and toss it on the floor. If the lid is on, supervise to make sure that your dog doesn't ingest it. They'll bat the bottle around and have a lot of fun with the crinkle sound of the plastic!

Tips to Get Started

If you stuff a toy or throw the cereal box on the floor and your dog casually sniffs and walks away. Don't despair! Remember, this is a new concept for your dog, give him some time to figure it out, experiment with different, tasty treats. If he doesn't like peanut butter, try cheese, lunchmeat, and bits of hotdogs or freeze dried liver.

You can also "cheat" by having parts of the treat accessible for him to immediately eat- sticking out the end of the Kong toy or the top of the water bottle. If it pays off immediately, then it's worth more investigation. Lastly, have fun and be creative. Email me if you have other ideas for enrichment and home made toys, I'd love to hear them!

Leigh Siegfried a Certified Pet Dog Trainer and Owner of Opportunity Barks Behavior & Training, offering private lessons, behavior consultations, group classes and workshops in Greater Philly Metro area, with training locations in Philadelphia and Quakertown, PA. Have a training question or want more information? Visit www.opbarks.com or call 888-OPBARKS.