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Entertaining your dog

Dogs are intelligent and social, but sadly we often have to leave our dogs alone for many hours a day. As a result, some dogs may develop social and behavioural problems. The chance of this is lessened if your dog gets regular daily exercise, routine family interaction and training through obedience clubs or by accredited trainers. In addition, you should find some handy ideas below to keep your dog busy when he's left alone, and other ideas to enhance your bond through fun play with your dog. This is called environmental enrichment, and the concept has dramatically improved the quality of lives of captive animals, and helps ward off age-related decrease in brain function (similar to Alzheimers).

Make sure you keep your dog safe from harm with any of these activities. If in any doubt, speak to your trainer or a veterinary behaviourist. Always think about what your dog is likely to enjoy, start with those activities, and then gradually make life more challenging for him- you never know what skills he may develop! It's fun to use your imagination.

Many of these ideas have been borrowed and adapted from The Delta Society, Dog's Life Magazine and multiple behavioural references.

TOYS

Most dogs love to chew, mangle and pull stuffing out of toys. Work out what your dog likes best and have plenty on offer, but remember to rotate them daily so he doesn't get bored on the same ones. Also, make sure it can't break down into dangerous small parts that might be eaten whole and cause obstructions (old tennis balls are a classic hazard).

FOOD TOYS

Offer treats and meals in foraging devices, such as Kongs®, (www.kongcompany.com) Buster® Cubes (www.bustercubes.com) and StarMark Everlasting Treat Toys™ (www.vcaworld.com). Old milk containers also work well (remove the plastic lid and ring first and cut holes in the sides) or hiding food under empty plant containers. Cardboard rolls, egg cartons, cereal boxes can all be shredded by your dog to find treats inside. Often you'll need to teach your dog how to use these toys, so smearing peanut butter or cheese can help entice some interest at first. When you're home, you can also play a paper cup game- hide a treat under one cup and help him find it and learn to tip the cup over to get his reward. The following site offers fantastic toys which use similar ideas (<http://www.wagschoolbooks.com.au/shop/nina-ottosson-toys.html>.) Scattering his food on the lawn so he has to hunt for it is also entertaining, or hide the food around the garden for a treasure hunt. Make ice blocks of frozen beef or chicken stock, with treats or even a knotted rope frozen inside- great for a hot day!

Pig's ears and 'roo tails and large, raw meaty bones are also highly enjoyed by most dogs.



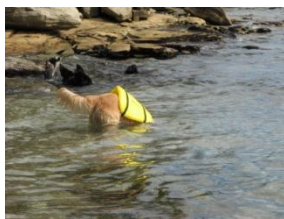
If you have more than one dog, be careful that they do not fight over food. Supervise at first.

DIGGING ACTIVITIES

Some dogs love to dig and can destroy yards if this is their hobby. Train his efforts onto a specific part of the yard (maybe an area hidden by shrubs) where the earth is soft, or build a sand pit for him. Children's clam shells can be useful small sand pits. Start off by shallowly burying some treats in a paper bag, or a favourite toy and help him dig. Gradually these can be placed deeper.



Many dogs like to dig to create a cool bed in which to lie. If this is your dog, make sure his digging area is large enough for him to lie in, and positioned in the shade.



WADING POOLS

For the water-lover, this can be great respite on a hot day. Fill a children's clam shell with water, or even create a small pond (make sure your dog can easily get out of the water). Floating or sinking toys, even apples and carrot pieces can create fun.

VIEWING PLATFORM

If your dog isn't overly excited (i.e. doesn't create nuisance barking) by pedestrians and traffic, creating a window seat, or peepholes in the fence, or a raised viewing platform can keep your dog happily entertained.



DOGGY DOOR

This provides freedom and control for your dog. He can be where he likes and when he likes. Many dogs will feel much safer knowing they have access to the indoors, and spend most of their time inside.

SWINGING TYRE

Some boisterous dogs find this a great energy outlet. Hang an old tyre from a tree, making sure it is anchored well to take his weight and the activity, and make sure he can't get tangled or caught in it and injured. Place treats inside and on top of the tyre to give him some rewards for his efforts.

The "home alone" toy is a hanging tug toy available from www.aussiedog.com.au

OUT AND ABOUT

Take your dog on short car trips with you to the shops or school deliveries for a change of scenery, and if time permits, a quick run in the park on the way home. Beware of leaving him in a hot car.

If you are very busy and lack time for exercising your dog, consider hiring a dog walker. This could be a friend or neighbour, or an advertised walker. Make sure you check

references and insurance and ask about the number of dogs being walked at once. If the route can be altered, this will also add interest to the walks.

Organise play sessions for your dog if he has some canine friends. Go for walks together, or organise visits to each other's homes. This really helps provide valuable ongoing socialisation.

Just walking the dog is a powerful stimulant for your dog. His sense of smell is 1000 times more powerful than ours, and hearing is 4 times better than ours. Let him sniff and explore his neighbourhood, roll on the grass and scratch around so he can leave his own scent trail.

BALL PLAY

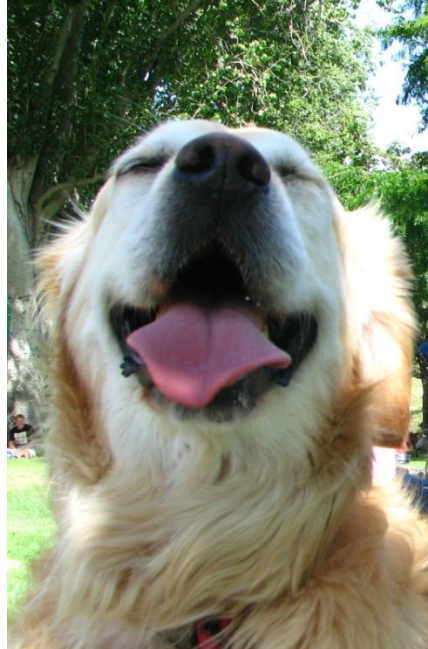
A natural instinct of most dogs is to follow moving objects and catch them. Teach your dog to fetch and retrieve for hours of fun exercise. First, your dog's attention must be focused on the ball as it is thrown into the air and caught again, then gradually it is thrown longer distances. Always praise your dog for dropping the ball and reward him with food or by continuing play. Never pull the ball from his mouth.

Teach your dog to play soccer and Frisbee for more active chasing sports.

OTHER IDEAS

- Training sessions-agility, obedience
- Doggy day care
- Hanging toys (make a piñata from a milk container with a small hole, filled with treats and suspended)
- Barrels, tunnels and boxes as an obstacle course
- Plant scent trails: dab a small amount of essential oil on an item and drag it around the house or yard and hide it. Ask your dog to find it. Reward him when he finds it. You can do this with your car keys and wallet too!
- Timed food dispensers e.g. Kongtime@dispenser
- Tennis ball server (www.godog.com.au)
- Moving furniture around
- Sprinklers on timers for hot days
- Food inside rags or material, or a multi-wrapped parcel
- Hide and seek with family- ask him to stay and hide just out of his line of sight. Call "come" and when he finds you give him plenty of praise. As he begins to learn the game, make it increasingly difficult by choosing harder places to hide, or by playing at night so he has to sniff you out.
- Teach your dog names of toys. Remove all his toys except 2 and ask him to point to each one, saying its name and giving him heaps of praise when he gets it right. Then place them on the floor and ask him to fetch them by name, rewarding correct answers. Once he's learnt two names, try more.
- Large or small: put a large pile of your dog's favourite treats in one hand, and one or two pieces in the other. Ask your dog to sit in front of your outstretched hands. Open your hands and say "small". If he rushes in, make him think and wait a few seconds before you say "small". When he gets it right by choosing the hand with

- the small quantity, let him eat it. If he gets it wrong, close your hands and start again. Switch hands too so he doesn't always choose the same hand.
- Play Postman. Write a note and teach your dog to “deliver” it to various family members.



Most importantly, have fun!!!