

STIMULATING IDEA'S TO KEEP DOGS HAPPY!

Courtesy of: The Modern Dog

Create A Challenging Meal

Feed at least one meal a day in a mentally stimulating and challenging way:

- In a food puzzle (Kyjen puzzles and slo feeders, Kongs and Kong Wobbler, Premier Tug-a-Jug, Barnacle, Squirrel Dude, and Mushroom, Buster Cube, Treat Ball, IQ Ball, Nina Ottosson puzzles) – these are not meant to be left unsupervised with the dog (with the exception of Kongs, Barnacle, Squirrel Dude)
- Throw the food into the yard.
- Put the food in an empty, dry (labels, rings, and caps removed) pop bottles, milk jugs, water bottles.
- Put the food in boxes (see “Toys” section for more information).
- Put the food in a muffin tin (see “Toys” section for more information).
- Use the food in a training session.
- Almost any of the ideas listed below will work to feed a meal.

Games

Get creative and encourage owners to play games with their dogs. Here are a few games that are simple and quick to play every day.

- Hide and seek – with people, toys, and food
- Rapid recalls
- Round Robin recalls
- Tag
- Musical chairs – play music, play with your dog, when the music stops ask your dog to execute a behavior on a mat or a rug, when the music starts again, play again
- What can you do? – get your clicker and treats, ask your dog “what can you do?” start clicking and treating offered behaviors (your dog will probably do SOMETHING to get you to click/treat – use these behaviors to play this game – when we play this, the dogs must offer different behaviors to get the click/treat. Note: this is not a shaping exercise; this is a game.)
- 101 Things to Do With a Box (or a laundry basket)

Toys

Toys come in all shapes and sizes. They are great tools to prevent boredom and enrich a dog's life.

- Flirt pole (make your own – directions can be found online; I like the Kong version because it's easy to change out the toy at the end of the line).
- Long line with a grocery sack on the end – your own version of lure coursing (think greyhound racing and chasing the lure). ****Don't let your dog chew on or ingest the bag!****
- Ice sculptures – bowl or bucket or bottom half of a gallon jug – fill with water, toys, treats (carrots and apples work really well!) – freeze – put outside for your dog to play with, interact with, get the toys and treats out of.
- Boxes – start with one box, put some treats or a favorite toy in it, have your dog get the treats/toy out of the box. Progress to nesting boxes with the treats/toy in the innermost box. (This can also be used to feed meals.) Make it more interesting by using peanut butter, spray cheese, or cream cheese in one of the boxes.
- Muffin tin – put treats or kibble in each hole, cover some or all of the holes with tennis balls or crumpled paper. You can also use canned food, rehydrated foods, peanut butter, spray cheese, yogurt, and cream cheese
- Yoga mat – unroll, sprinkle treats, roll back up. Have your dog unroll the mat and get treats.
- Small round basket – put treats or a toy under the upturned basket and have your dog figure out how to get them.
- Perches – phone books covered in duct tape or small, stable stools. Play with different things your dog can do with these. Two paws on (front, back, right, left), four paws on, two paws on move around, etc.
- Hol-ee ball stuffed with fleece strips and small treats or kibble

Make a “burrito” out of an old towel or blanket, folded up with treats in the folds.

Things You Can Leave With The Dog Unsupervised

If it is a multiple dog situation, I only recommend these if each dog is in a crate while you are gone to prevent any issues with resource guarding.

- Stuffed and frozen Kongs, Squirrel Dudes, Barnacles
- Bully sticks – freeze these too so they last longer
- Stuffed and frozen tracheas
- Ears – cow, pig, lamb

Mental stimulation is as important as physical stimulation for dogs. Encourage your clients to play games and work with their dogs to build their bond and prevent boredom in their dogs.