

ENRICHMENT AND DIY ENRICHMENT IDEAS— DOGS

Enrichment refers to a variety of activities and strategies designed to keep your dog mentally and physically stimulated. Enrichment is important for your dog's overall well-being. It helps prevent boredom, reduce anxiety, and promote good behavior. Remember to tailor enrichment activities to your dog's age, size, and individual preferences. Dogs benefit from a combination of these activities, and regularly changing their enrichment routine can help keep them engaged and happy. Remember to supervise your dog during DIY enrichment activities and make sure that any materials or objects used are safe and non-toxic.

MENTAL STIMULATION

PUZZLE TOYS: Invest in interactive toys like Kong or treat-dispensing balls. These toys challenge your dog's problem-solving skills.

HIDE AND SEEK: Hide treats or toys around the house or yard and encourage your dog to find them. Work on teaching the cue “Find it!” and it becomes a fun game of hide and seek. Over time you can make the hiding spots more complicated.

FOOD PUZZLES: Use puzzle feeders, snuffle mats, or make your own by hiding kibble/treats in boxes, containers, paper bags, a rolled up towel, or a muffin tin.

TRAINING SESSIONS: Teach your dog new tricks or reinforce existing commands to keep their mind active. This type of work stimulates their mind and many dogs feel satisfied after working for treats/food.

SCENT WORK: In addition to playing hide and seek which is a form of scent work, you can also create scent trails to encourage your dog to sniff out their favorite treats. Create a scent trail by sprinkling treats or kibble around your yard or living space, encouraging your dog to use their nose to follow the trail.

PHYSICAL EXERCISE

REGULAR WALKS: Daily walks or hikes are very important for your dog's physical and mental health.

PLAY FETCH: Throwing a ball or toy can help your dog burn off energy.

INTERACTIVE GAMES: Games like tug-of-war, tag, or chase can provide exercise and good mental stimulation. Your dog will love it when you're involved in their games!

AGILITY COURSES: Set up a small agility course in your yard to engage your dog in physical challenges. Reward them as they walk around obstacles, and teach them to hop over small objects.

SOCIAL INTERACTION

PLAYDATES: Arrange playdates with other dogs (or human friends if your dog doesn't like other dogs!) to encourage socialization and exercise.

GROUP TRAINING CLASSES: Enroll your dog in obedience or agility classes where they can interact with other dogs and people.

SENSORY STIMULATION

SENSORY WALKS: Take a walk specifically for sensory stimulation. Let your dog explore different textures, scents, and surfaces during walks. Let them sniff and investigate. Sniffing and exploring is a really good way to mentally stimulate a dog. Experts say that 20 minutes of sniffing can be equivalent to an hour's worth of a walk with regards to enrichment.

TOUCH: Use toys with various different textures and shapes to engage your dog's sense of touch.

ENVIRONMENTAL ENRICHMENT

ROTATE TOYS: Change your dog's toys regularly to keep their interest in them. This can be as simple as holding back a few toys each week and swapping them back and forth every week (or every few days depending on your preference!).

CREATE A DIGGING PIT: Dogs love to dig and it's also great exercise for them! Provide a designated area for your dog to dig in your yard (or in a hard bottomed kiddie pool if you don't have a yard). Fill the digging area with sand or soft soil and let them enjoy!

USE WATER PLAY: Some dogs love playing in kiddie pools or with a hose, which can be a fun and cooling activity.

INTERACTIVE FEEDERS

SLOW-FEED BOWLS: Slow-feed bowls can make mealtime more challenging and mentally stimulating for your dog. This is an easy way to get in some extra mental stimulation in your everyday routine.

SNUFFLE MATS: These mats have pockets where you can hide food, encouraging your dog to use their nose to find it. Swap a bowl out and feed meals in this for a more mentally stimulating meal.

PUZZLE TOYS: These can come in the form of puzzle boards, treat dispensing balls, and rubber toys you can fill, such as Kongs. These may take a dog longer to get to their treat inside and provide good mental enrichment as the dog works for the treat. The act of licking has also been shown to reduce stress, and licking treats out of these can help with de-stressing as well! Fun things to put in these are: treats, wet food, pureed pumpkin, peanut butter (without xylitol), and for extra fun, freeze them so they take longer to lick away!

DIY ENRICHMENT

HOMEMADE PUZZLE TOYS: Create homemade puzzle toys and games using things cardboard boxes, toilet paper rolls, and other safe materials you can hide treats inside. Stuff treats into paper lunch bags and roll them up so your dog can rip up the paper and get to the treat, roll a towel up while placing treats throughout it, and let your dog slowly unravel it as they eat the treats, or fold the ends of an empty toilet paper roll after placing treats inside- there are a ton of options! Make sure to always monitor your dog to make sure they aren't ingesting cardboard and paper.

HOMEMADE SNUFFLE MATS: Make a snuffle mat by tying fleece strips or old t-shirts to a rubber mat or piece of cardboard. Hide treats in the fabric strips, and let your dog sniff and search for them.

FROZEN TREATS: Make frozen treats by freezing low-sodium dog-safe broth (without onion or garlic in it), plain yogurt, or fruits in ice cube trays. These frozen treats are perfect for hot days and can keep your dog engaged for a while.

DIY AGILITY COURSE: Set up a small agility course in your backyard or living room using household items like cones, broom handles, or hula hoops. Teach your dog to navigate the course, jump through hoops, or weave between cones.

MUFFIN TIN PUZZLE: Make your own dog puzzles by placing treats or kibble in muffin tins and covering them with tennis balls. Your dog will need to move the balls to access the hidden goodies.

DIY FLIRT POLE: Make a DIY flirt pole by attaching a stuffed animal or a plush toy to a long rope or PVC pipe. Swing it around to engage your dog in an exciting game of chase and pounce.

