

It's A Dog's World™

K - 9 A C A D E M Y

3890 Walnut Ave. Chino, Ca. 91710 • Local 909-548-3150 • Toll Free 866-324-DOGS • Fax 909-548-3154
www.ItsADogsWorld.biz

Canine Enrichment

Dogs have become so much a part of our lives and have been domesticated for so many years, that we tend to forget they actually are captive animals, and our homes are artificial environments. A great many canine behavior problems can be traced to a lack of enrichment. Consequently, many behavior problems can be minimized and some completely resolved once a good enrichment program has been put into place. Insufficient stimulation can cause or exacerbate a number of behavior problems including hyperactivity, destructive chewing, barking, digging, attention-seeking behavior, compulsive disorders and certain forms of aggression.

The more types of enrichment you provide for your dog, the less likely your dog will be to develop behavior problems or health problems that are related to stress, anxiety, and boredom. Just a few changes in your routine with your dog can make all the difference!!

What type of enrichment can you provide your dog?

When considering the natural behavior of most canines, it is obvious that the average pet dog receives very low levels of environmental stimulation. Most non-domestic animals spend the majority of their time foraging for food. In addition, they must seek out or construct resting areas and avoid predators and other natural hazards. Pet dogs on average spend less than 15 minutes per day eating because they do not have to forage for food. They are kept in static and often monotonous environments. The majority of dog breeds were developed for some functional purpose (guarding, herding, hunting, etc.) yet few dogs actually participate in these activities.

Keep in mind, that not all dogs enjoy the same types of activities and it is important that whenever a new toy or enrichment item is introduced, that the dog is initially supervised to determine not only the effectiveness of the enrichment activity, but also to make sure the dog interacts appropriately with the toy.

Food Toys & Puzzles

There are a number of great toys and puzzles on the market to aid in stimulating your dog's mind and alleviating boredom. Many of these toys involve the use of food as not only a play motivator, but as a reward for continued interest. In many cases these food-dispensing toys can be used in place of your dog's regular meal. Some of the more common types of treat-dispensing toys are:

Stuffable toys

These toys come in a variety of shapes and sizes to fit your dog's needs. Some of the more common toys are Kongs® & Buster-cubes® but you can also use hollowed out marrow bones. They all have the same thing in common: you put treats, kibble or other acceptable food items in them and your dog has to figure out how to remove the food. Some of the companies that make these toys provide recipes and treat ideas to make the toys even more interesting to your dog. Freezing food, such as peanut butter, inside of one of these toys will also make the playtime last longer.



Puzzles

Puzzle toys also utilize food as a motivator for your dog, but they usually require that your dog manipulate the toy in a specific way to receive the food reward. These toys may have a series of slots with sliding covers that hide the food. Similar to the old “shell” game, food is hidden in one of the slots and the dog has to not only determine where the treat is hidden, but how to get it out.



In addition to purchased treat dispensing toys, you can also create some fairly inexpensive and fun ways to feed your dog while enriching the eating experience. These can include:

- Placing dog food or treats inside a cardboard box or an old towel/rag and allow the dog to tear the item apart to get to the food inside.
- Scattering food out in the grass in the yard or across the floor in your house to make the dog search for each piece.
- Dividing portions of the dog’s meal into small Tupperware containers and hiding them around the house for the dog to find.
- Adding bullion (or other broths) to water and freezing into a popsicle in a variety of sizes of Tupperware. You can add various pieces of food items to these: cereal, fruits, vegetables, dog food, cheese, meat, etc.

Besides toys, there are other ways to enrich your dog’s life and alleviate potential boredom. Take into account the specific breed of dog you have and tailor the activity to meet the dog’s instinctual needs. For instance, if your dog is a scent hound, you may want to place novel scents in the environment using small amounts of spices, herbs, extracts, or synthetic animal scents (e.g. rabbit, quail, squirrel, etc. available from a sporting goods store). Vanilla and anise are two favorite scents that dogs enjoy.

You can also try some of the following:

- Build the dog a sand box either by sectioning off a 4-5 foot square area in your yard or buying a child’s wading pool and filling it with sand and dirt. Bury a variety of toys, bones, etc. and encourage your dog to dig in the sand box.
- Fill a child’s wading pool with water. If the dog enjoys both water and digging, you can alternate the substrate in the pool each week.
- Hang rope or inner tubes from a branch or other item in the yard for the dog to play tug with.
- If your dog is sociable with other dogs, try scheduling doggy “play-dates” with your friends or arrange for your dog to go to an interactive Doggy Day Care one or two days a week
- Participate in training sessions or other dog sport activities (flyball, agility, tracking, Frisbee, etc with your dog. These not only help stimulate your dog’s mind and burn off your dog’s energy, but it also provides an excellent bonding opportunity between you and your pet.