

Enrichment Options for a Constructive Canine

Dogs are natural foragers and scavengers. Sometimes this can get them into trouble! However, offering an appropriate outlet for those instincts can be a great way to keep your dog occupied—while unsupervised, during a social event, while crated, in the car, or whenever you need to keep their attention focused *constructively*. You can also feed your dog their meals in these ways to build mental enrichment into their daily lives. Below is a comprehensive list of enrichment options, along with some helpful tutorials to help you and your dog become enrichment experts!

Pupsicles:

- Take a yogurt cup, ice cube tray, or other suitable container and fill it partially with water or broth.
- Add some wet food and a little bit of dry food, make certain not to overfill the container.
- Place into the freezer for a frozen treat for a dog!

Note: Pupsicles can be made with lots of different shapes to suit your dogs' needs! Get creative and experiment!



Kongs

- Fill the Kong using a mixture of dry food and either wet food, peanut butter, cream cheese, or other wet ingredient. Try to keep a high percentage of dry food (or water, if using wet only) to prevent upset tummies. You can “stopper” the small end with peanut butter, wet food, or a piece of correctly sized kibble.
- Kongs can be given out as soon as they are made or can be frozen and passed out at a later date. Frozen Kongs can keep dogs occupied for longer periods of time.
- **Make sure to research any human food you plan on adding to the Kong to make sure it is safe for your furry friend to eat!**



Cardboard Tube Toys

- Paper towel/toilet paper tubes are convenient, safe options for dogs to tear apart.
- Take a paper towel or toilet paper tube and place some kibble or treats (no wet food) inside. You can also make them without food, instead adding a novel scent.
- Fold in the edges to prevent the food items from rolling out.
- For added difficulty and to bulk up space, try stuffing some newspaper into the tube as well.



Paper Bag Toys

- Paper bags (grocery bags, lunch bags, fast food bags) can create novel puzzle toys and toys for shredding.
- Use a combination of crumpled newspaper and appropriate kibble to partially fill the bag. You could also use shredded newspaper in place of food.
- Fold the bag down to make “seal.” You can also tie it off, or tape it with a paper-based tape like masking tape.
- Try giving it a little rattle when offering it to the dog (unless they are shy or sensitive to noise) so they know there’s something inside. You can also cut a small hole in the side to encourage them to explore it.



Cardboard Box Toys

- Boxes (like tissue boxes or amazon boxes) can create great DIY puzzle toys for dogs.
- If desired, use some printer paper or newspaper crumpled or in strips to bulk out the interior.
- Choose an appropriately sized box. If there is no opening on it, you can cut out a small hole or gap that kibble can fall out of or that a nose could poke inside. Some dogs may choose to tear their own holes!
- Choose a treat or some kibble and mix it with the newspaper inside of the box. You can also add other higher value treats to sweeten the deal.

Egg Carton Toys

- The multiple containers in an egg carton make for a great puzzle toy for dogs to figure out how to open/dissect.
- Place appropriate kibble, treats, and food items into the carton.
- If there are no openings in the top of the carton, you can elect to cut some small holes that kibble could fall out of.
- Close carton and give to a dog. If they have trouble figuring it out, place some kibble on top of the carton near the holes.
- Note: The carton pictured below only has less than $\frac{1}{4}$ of a cup in it.



Pipe Feeders

A simple piece of PVC piping with some holes drilled in it can become an excellent puzzle toy for dogs to play with. Simply place a small amount of appropriate dry food or treats into the feeder. Once everything is in, screw the cap back into place and drop it off for the dog! You can roll it a bit to let some kibble out if they're not sure what to do with it.

Instructions for DIY builds:

- 8-12 inches of 1" to 2" width pvc pipe and 2 fitting caps (screw cap or regular)
- Drill or cut out 4-6 holes that will allow kibble to fall out (around $\frac{5}{8}$ ")
- Be sure to file down any edges or leftover plastic around the drilling site
- Add caps to either end.

NOTE: These should NOT be left unattended with dogs, especially those who are serious chewers.



The Towel Maze “Bowl”

- Dogs have a strong instinct to sniff and forage using their nose. You don’t need fancy equipment to help them take advantage of it! Since sniffing is a calming activity, this can be a great option for an excitable dog.
- Lay out a towel or other flat fabric on the ground.
- Scatter small pieces of kibble, treats, or other food onto the fabric surface. Pieces should be smaller than ¼”.
- Twist the fabric in a circle from the the middle so that the kibble becomes caught in the folds.
- Voila! DIY snuffle mat for your dog!



Store-bought options

There are many foraging and puzzle specific toys you can buy for your dog. They come in all different shapes, sizes and purposes.

Snuffle mats

These can be DIY or store bought. The idea behind them is to encourage your dog to sniff and snuffle in order to find/forage kibble “hidden” in a shaggy surface. Sniffing has been shown to be a calming activity for your dog’s nervous system. You can even forego the mat and use a natural surface such as grass – though you may need to start easy by scattering kibble on a patio/sidewalk/pavement surface first and working up to scattering their kibble into the grass.



Wobblers



These toys work similarly to the pipe feeders, but with larger capacity. This is another engaging way you can feed your dog their meals. Wobblers work best with dry treats or dry kibble. Once your dog is used to using them, they can be a wonderful way to occupy your dog while you perform other activities such as cooking, working at a computer, etc. If your dog is ready for the next level, the Buster Cube puzzle toy is a more difficult version of this game.

Slow Feeder Bowls



While these aren't true puzzles, they can be an excellent way to slow down a fast eater, or to start a less confident dog on an easy path to becoming a master puzzle solver. If your dog easily gets frustrated with more complex puzzles, try a slow feeder bowl!

To infinity—and beyond!

There are TONS of interesting and exciting options for enrichment out there. They can help your dog curb frustration, stay engaged mentally and physically, and provide appropriate outlets for their natural behaviors. Have fun exploring!

