

Enrichment Options for a Constructive Canine

Dogs are natural foragers and scavengers. Sometimes this can get them into trouble! Contrary to popular belief, providing food puzzles will not make a dog more likely to tear up your house. Quite the opposite; offering "legal" ways for them to meet their instinctual needs will make them LESS likely to go looking for trouble-- because they're already getting those needs met elsewhere. In this handout we'll offer you a comprehensive overview of canine enrichment!

What are the practical advantages to offering enrichment activities?

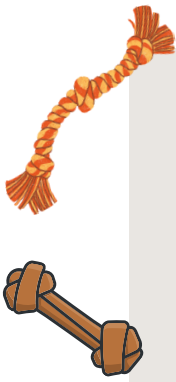


- **Providing a constructive *alternative* to an undesirable to an undesirable activity** (chewing/barking/counter surfing)
- **Keeping them occupied during a stressful or exciting time** (visitors/mealtimes/coffee shops)
- **Assisting in meeting high energy needs** (tiring their brains *tires their bodies out* too!)
- **Offering them a more fun, enjoyable, and enriching daily routine!**

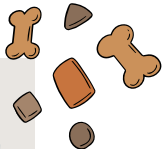
So what do outlets for "species-typical behaviors" look like?

Species-typical behavior:

Example of enrichment alternative:



Scavenging for food	→	Nose work games!
Dissecting scavenged items	→	Shred-able cardboard food enrichment!
Hunting burrowing animals	→	Digging in a sandbox!
Mapping their world through scent	→	Decompression walks/Sniffaris!
Crunching up bones	→	Frozen carrots/ice chews!
Hunting fast birds or mammals	→	Flirt pole/Woof Stick!
Chasing prey through obstacles	→	DIY agility activities!
Engaging in cold environments	→	Kiddie pool full of bagged ice!
Engaging in aquatic hunting	→	Playing in water/bobbing for toys!



Natural instincts

Dogs' bodies don't stop telling them to do these things just because they live with us. Offering them ways to meet those needs in their daily routine is just one way we can help them live happier and more fulfilled lives.

Think about what YOUR dog likes to do; this might include breed-specific preferences!

Food Puzzle Enrichment

Let's look at an easy way to introduce species-typical behaviors into your dog's routine--*food puzzles*! There are many food puzzles that you can purchase for your dog, but many MORE that you can create for them with items you might already have on hand. A good enrichment program doesn't have to break the bank!

Ice is nice: Frozen Enrichment

Freezing your enrichment can be a wonderful way of extending the time your dog works on a particular item.

Examples of frozen enrichment:

- **Kongs or Toppl toys** frozen with wet food, yogurt, peanut butter, etc. inside
- **Carrots** either frozen plain or after being soaked in broth (great for chewers and puppies!)
- **Lick mats** smeared with food/spray cheese/yogurt/etc. and frozen
- **Bowls, ice trays, or recycled yogurt cups** frozen with water and food (dry/wet/treats/fruit/veggies)
 - NOTE: Remove from a plastic container before giving to your dog!



You can feed meals this way!

Eco-Enrichment: Recyclables

Paper and cardboard make ideal receptacles for enrichment puzzles because if a dog accidentally ingests a portion, *it will not cause a digestive blockage*. Most dogs will work to eat only the food items offered. However, if your dog is routinely consuming the ENTIRETY of the cardboard, we recommend finding an alternative activity.

Examples of recyclable enrichment:

- **Cardboard boxes** with treats inside (no plastic tape)
- **Toilet paper or paper towel rolls** with the sides folded in and treats inside
- **Egg cartons** smeared with food/spray cheese or sprinkled with kibble or treats
- **Paper grocery bags** with goodies inside, open/rolled up/nesting drolled
- **Newspaper or scrap paper balls** filled with treats or crumbs

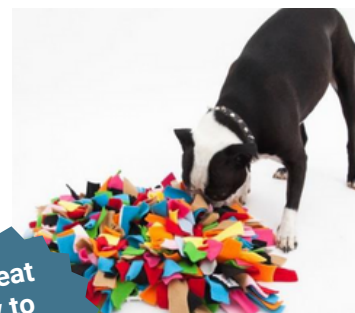


Sniffing: Your most POWERFUL tool!

Sniffing has been scientifically proven to **lower a dog's heart rate**--the longer they sniff, the calmer they become. Not only that, but processing all that information (100 million scent receptors!) is physically tiring! This makes sniffing enrichment very desirable element to incorporate into enrichment.

Examples of sniffing enrichment:

- **Nose work** doesn't have to be competition level! There are lots of simple exercises that can help work your dogs brain. Google "easy nose work enrichment" for ideas!
- **Snuffle mats** create a surface where dogs must root out food or treats
- **DIY snuffle mats** can be created easily out of a blanket or sheet--just scatter and twist
- **Rolled towels** allow you to include a puzzle where a dog has to push or dig in addition to sniffing



A great way to quickly tire a dog out!



PRO TIPS!

Your pooch's preference

Dogs have preferences just like humans do! A dog who loves a wobbler might be bored by a frozen lick mat, and a dog who loves to dissect might find a wobbler too frustrating.

It's our job to discover what OUR dog loves best, and go from there--and **sometimes this takes a bit of trial and error!**

Start on "easy mode"

While many dogs innately show the persistence necessary to "solve" their food puzzles, many more need to gradually increase difficulty. If it's too hard, they may get frustrated and quit.

Consider how you can start a particular puzzle on "easy mode," and/or increase the value of the food to encourage persistence!

Variety is the spice of life

Rotating the enrichment you offer is so important! Just like we might get bored doing the same thing every day, our dogs can lose interest in the same enrichment every day.

See if you can find several options your dog loves, and **rotate through them to keep them consistently novel!**

Safety first

It's essential to make sure that any enrichment you give your dog is safe. When considering an enrichment item, **ask yourself:**

- Is it a choking hazard?
- Could it cause a blockage if swallowed?
- Is MY dog likely to engage in this in an unsafe way? (ex. might eat part of the towel)
- Does this item **need to be supervised to be safe?**