



Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

ENRICHING YOUR DOG'S ENVIRONMENT

WHY IS ENRICHMENT IMPORTANT?

Animals that are confined in relatively restricted environments are more likely to develop health problems as well as behavior problems. Dogs that are bored develop destructive and annoying behaviors, such as barking, chewing, and digging, in order to entertain themselves. By enriching your dog's environment, you can prevent many of these problems from occurring and build a stronger bond with your dog.

SOCIALIZATION

Socialization is one of the most crucial aspects of raising a dog and enriching its life. It is important to expose your dog to as many new situations as possible from an early age. Expose your dog to new places, new people, and a variety of animals. This will teach your dog not to be fearful and will also build confidence, making your dog less likely to respond adversely to new situations.

OBEDIENCE CLASSES

Obedience class is a great way to improve your dog's life! This will encourage your dog to think for himself in order to receive a reward. Training classes should be fun for both you and your dog. Along with learning important commands, your dog will learn basic manners and be able to interact with other dogs and new people.

SPORTS

Participating in sports such as agility, flyball, tracking, field trials, and canine freestyle allow your dog to get out of the house and burn some energy while having fun.

ENRICHING YOUR HOUSE

Dogs are not born knowing what is appropriate to chew on and what is not. They view everything in their world as a giant chew toy! Chewing is a natural behavior for dogs and is one they should be allowed to do. We must provide appropriate chew items for our dogs. When dogs become bored they get into trouble. Provide a variety of items for your dog to play with and chew on. Some examples of appropriate enrichment items are:

- Balls (Make sure the size of the toy you choose for your dog is appropriate for his size; toys that are too small can lodge in your dog's throat)
- Buster Cubes are plastic cubes with a hole in them, into which you can insert hard treats or kibble. Dogs have to push the cube around with their snouts and paws to get the food out. It can make every meal into an exercise in paw-eye coordination.
- Chew toys
- Food puzzles
- Kong chew toys, which are durable and chewy and can be filled with high value food. Dog can sometimes spend hours trying to reach extremely high value food from the Kong. I like to use cream cheese.

- Plush squeaky toys can be great if your dog is motivated by exciting sounds. Be sure to supervise your dog during play, since a swallowed squeaky can be a choking hazard.
- “Nothing in Life is Free” dog training. This means that your dog must perform an appropriate behavior (sit, down, walk on a loose lead, etc.) to earn anything that is good in his life (meals, treats, affection, praise, games, etc.).

ENRICHING YOUR YARD

Dogs that stay outside are the most likely to get into trouble, due to lack of mental stimulation. Dogs that are left alone in yards without adequate enrichment may begin to dig, bark, and try to escape, or become destructive. It is important to provide plenty of toys and chew items for your outside dog as well as proper shade and water. If you have a dog that likes to dig, try providing him with an appropriate digging area. You can build him a sand box and let him watch you bury dog toys and chew items. Whenever you see a sign that your dog is able to dig inappropriately (pawing lightly or sniffing at the ground), redirect him to his sandbox.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON ENRICHING YOUR DOG'S LIFE, PLEASE CONTACT OUR ANIMAL BEHAVIOR SPECIALISTS BY PHONE AT 713-869-7722 X 187 OR EMAIL animals@hspca.org.