

ENRICHMENT: FUN THINGS TO TRY AT HOME



Hello!

Let's face it, all these lockdowns have been dull and we're all pretty fed up having been cooped up for so long. Chances are your dog feels just the same as you do. Have you noticed them becoming lazier? More destructive? Wanting extra attention? Or maybe just a little bit podgier? (I'm certainly sporting an extra roll or two!)

Lots of people think of enrichment as something that happens in a zoo as a boredom buster, but with advances in research and understanding of domestic pets needs, it's something that is now super accessible to all. It doesn't need to be expensive, and there's loads of things you can try to provide mental and physical stimulation for your dog.

I've put together this little guide which will hopefully give you guys a few ideas and the opportunity to try some new things out at home. Whether your dog is a foodie, a non-stop whirlwind or in their golden years, there should be something for everyone and you can be as cautious or adventurous as you see fit for your dog.

(I know it's quite a few pages, please don't be scared! I want to make sure it's accessible and legible for all ages and abilities).

Happy enriching!

FOOD BASED ENRICHMENT

Food is quite often a key motivator for dogs, and there's loads of ways you can get their brains ticking while filling their tummies. Just bear in mind if you're using this kind of enrichment on top of their daily meals that some treats can be pretty calorific so try to choose low fat options, or use some of these ideas to present their meals in to keep dinner time fun.

Slow Feeders & Puzzle Feeders

- *Kongs* – great for stuffing with little treats and smearing the inside with pastes (available at pet shops), cream cheese, marmite or peanut butter. They can also be frozen if you want it to last a little longer. Be careful if using peanut butter as some brands contain xylitol, which is highly toxic to dogs. Sun-pat and Skippy are dog safe, or you can buy Peamutt which is specially made for dogs.



39 HEALTHY TREATS you can stuff in a kong

Apples	Cheese	Pumpkin
Applesauce	Cottage Cheese	Rice
Asparagus	Cucumber	Rutabaga
Baby Food	Eggs	Salmon
Bananas	Flax Seeds	Spinach
Blackberries	Green Beans	Squash
Blueberries	Honey	Steak
Broccoli	Kale	Strawberries
Brussels Sprouts	Oatmeal	Snap Peas
Cantaloupe	Oranges	Sweet Potato
Carrots	Peanut Butter	Watermelon
Cauliflower	Peas	Yogurt
Celery	Pineapple	Zucchini

Slow Feeders & Puzzle Feeders

- *Kong Wobblers* – brilliant for nosey dogs that want to ‘boop’ something around enthusiastically enough for the treats to fall out.

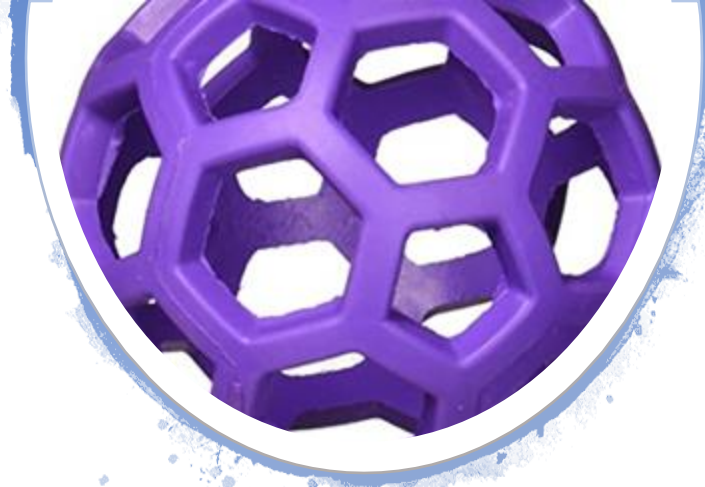


- *Puzzle Feeders* – your dog will benefit from a little mental stimulation and enjoy a lovely treat reward when he’s figured it out. Start off nice and easy and once you feel like it’s not stimulating any more there’s loads of products available with different levels of difficulty to keep his brain ticking.



Nosey Games

- *Hole ee Roller Ball* – this is really versatile; you can make it as easy or hard as you like. Grab a fleece or towel, pop the treats in, weave or stuff into the ball and away you go!
- *Scatter Feeding* – does what it says on the tin! You can use this method for feeding a meal or as a supplementary game, encouraging your dog to engage his nose and sniff out the tasty rewards.
- *Snuffle Mats* – these are all the rage at the moment and encourage the dog to forage in the material in order to find the hidden treats. They vary in price, size and difficulty so there's something for everyone, however there are online tutorials and kits if you wanted to get crafty and make your own.



Calming Treats

- *Licki Mats* – licking is a behaviour that doesn't just keep a dog clean, it can have a calming and therapeutic effect too. Like the Kong, just spread a tasty paste on it. These can also be frozen for a longer lasting treat, and are brilliant as a distraction when bathing or grooming as there are products that you can stick onto walls to keep him busy while you do your thing.

- *Pupsicles* – these don't have to just be a treat frozen in water, there are a number of 'bases' you can use such as plain yoghurt, cream cheese and even baby food. You could use ice cube trays, muffin tins or cake tins but just be mindful of the size of the enrichment dependent on your dogs size. Add biscuits or raw veggies for an added crunch. Would also recommend you keep this as an outdoor activity, they can make one hell of a mess!



DIY Enrichment

- *Muffin Tray & Tennis Balls* – this one is super simple; literally pop your treats in the muffin tin and cover each hole with a tennis ball. To make it harder you could wedge the tennis ball in to make it trickier to remove. And once it's done, he's got a room full of tennis balls to play with!
- *Puzzle Balls* – another way to repurpose a tennis ball can be to turn it into a feeder. Cut a hole in one and before you know it you've got a home made puzzle feeder. You can make the hole as big or small as you like, and it's not limited to tennis balls. If you have a large breed dog this could be done with a basketball or football, and as they're not quite as rigid, there's the added bonus of it changing shape during play.



DIY Enrichment

- *Stuffed Household Items* – chances are I'm guessing you've got an old plastic bottle lying around waiting to be recycled? Simply cut a few holes in it, put some treats in and roll it around on the floor. This does require some supervision though, as you don't want tongues getting stuck or any ingestion incidents. And of course, make sure the labels and cap have been removed. Cardboard boxes, toilet roll tubes and shoe boxes are great for enrichment as they're so versatile. You could hide treats in a box and then it's up to you how hard you want your furry friend to work to get them! You can use newspaper, towels, leaves (if you're outside!) to fill the box to make it stimulating. Mixing up what you use is just another way to keep that nose busy and brain working. This one does require supervision as well, just to make sure he's not eating anything inappropriate. There is a good chance he'll shred the box, so there might be a little cleaning up after, but it's totally worth it having seen the fun being had.
- *Old Towels & Clothes* – towels are fantastic for 'burritoing'; lay it out flat, sprinkle some treats across and roll up like a burrito. You can make it as loose or tight as you like depending on how quickly it gets worked out. Old socks are also a fun way of getting a nose and brain active and is a little trickier than unrolling a towel. Initially just put the treats in and see how it goes, this one isn't for everyone. If he enjoys it and works it out, try putting a loose knot in the open end. This will encourage using his paws or teeth to get the biscuits out. Again, supervision recommended. Although we wouldn't entertain the idea of eating an old sock, our four legged friends may have other ideas!



ACTIVITY BASED ENRICHMENT

For those of you with puppies or high energy breeds, I'm sure there have been a couple of "why aren't you tired?! You should be exhausted!" moments over the last year or so... Exercise is of course a key part of a dog's life, with certain breeds needing a lot more than others. Hopefully these ideas might be able to not only physically tire your bundle of energy out, but also get their brains involved for added enrichment. It is worth bearing in mind the breed you have and their age – high impact exercise is not suitable for young puppies for instance, so tailor any activities for your dog to suit. It's also important to remember if you have a puppy that rest is incredibly important for their development so taking regular breaks is key.

- *DIY Obstacle Course* – you can set this up inside or outside using anything you have in the house and make it as big or small as you want; brooms for jumps, using cushions to make a tunnel, plant pots to weave through... there are so many options. Get your dog to follow you through your course with rewards along the way and soon enough they'll be at home agility stars in no time!



Activity Based

- *Swing Ball* – a 90's garden staple, the swing ball is certainly a fond childhood memory of mine! If you don't have a garden big enough to have a decent game of fetch, this could be a good alternative and you don't need me to explain why a dog might love a game of swing ball.
- *Hide & Seek* – if your dog knows how to sit and wait this can be great way to get them to not only actively move around, but also engages their nose too. If you've got a fidgety dog, just get someone in your home to hold onto him while you go hide. On release, combine with a command of your choice such as 'go find!' or 'find me!' and reward with lots of praise or cuddles, a treat or toy when they've found you. Once your dog understands the command you can always incorporate this when on a walk to add another fun aspect to being out and about. Always make sure you are safe to do so though and with another person to make sure someone is keeping an eye out for both your and your dog's safety.



Activity Based

- *Flirt Poles* – a similar idea to the swing ball, a flirt pole is a handle with some sort of rope or bungee cord with a toy attached at the end. They're awesome for households with limited space as you can move them in any way you like. Your dog will have a great time chasing the toy, but allowing them to catch it is of utmost importance, otherwise they won't really get anything out of it and might lose interest. Why chase something if you never get the reward of catching it?! Depending on how you use it, it can promote not just exercise but it could be combined with an obstacle course, improving flexibility.
- *Boomer Balls* – these are a bit like marmite; some dogs love them and some couldn't give two hoots. The size and durability make them ideal for large dog breeds as they quite often can't quite fit their mouth round, so it encourages them to be more tactile and chase it around, promoting high energy play. They are available in different sizes, so they're not limited to large dogs, but they're ideal for anyone with a dog that loves to chew and generally destroy anything in their path!
- *Bubbles* – easily the simplest activity! Get some kids bubbles and see if your dog responds to them. If they do, you've got another little trick up your sleeve for a wonderful game. And if you have children, this might actually work to exhaust both parties! Just be mindful of the dog jumping up or getting over excited, you don't want any accidents that might cause a flood of tears.



Activity Based

- *Bobbing for Toys* – definitely an outdoor activity and only really suitable for dogs that enjoy water. Similar to the ball pit, fill a children’s paddling pool to a depth appropriate for your dog and float toys in it. It’s totally up to you what you want to put in the water, but choose things that your dog will really want to ‘rescue’. The exercise opportunities are brilliant for this, as every dog reacts differently. Some run around the pool, some jump in and out, some just splash about. Whatever the reaction, it will definitely tire them out.
- *Sand Pits or Digging Pits* – dogs have an innate instinct to dig, so it’s not unusual if you’re noticing holes appearing all over the lawn. Providing a designated digging area not only allows them to fulfil a natural instinct, it is also great exercise. Once they learn that is the place they can go to dig, it’ll save you the cost and effort of reurfing the lawn too. If you’re limited for space, you can pick up a children’s paddling pool and fill it with a substrate of your choice. To get the dog accustomed to the area you could bury their favourite toys or treats to encourage them associating that area with the behaviour. Only problem is that it could end up a bit on the messy side.



DIY Enrichment

- *Five Senses Ball* – this is a toy that has been specifically designed to stimulate all five of your dog's senses and is suitable for puppies and those in their golden years. It's beef flavoured and scented, has different textures and comes in colours that are most visible to dogs. As it's a ball it's obvious why it would promote exercise, and you could use it to help train a fetch behaviour, amongst other things. Warning: it does come equipped with a squeaker and a bell, so if you have an obsessive chewer or if your dog is overly enthusiastic about play and you would like a quiet life, this might not be the one for you!



- *Ball Pits* – a much less messy version of a sand pit or digging pit! It doesn't matter how much space you have, or whether its inside or out, any vessel that's about bucket size will work. Fill with plastic balls and scatter in treats, toys or anything with a novel smell on it and watch your pup get to work. It's a fantastic physical activity as well as getting their noses involved finding the goodies hidden within.



SENSORY & COGNITION BASED ENRICHMENT

Enrichment isn't just limited to stuff that's physically going to tire your pup out. For those working from home, how worn out do you feel after concentrating on the computer all day? You haven't really done much physically, but mentally you're pretty wiped right? Sensory enrichment and activities that encourage your dog to engage their brain for short periods of time have been shown to have the same tiring effect as an energetic walk. And unlike endless Zoom meetings, sensory enrichment is actually enjoyable! It's fun for your dog and you get to watch them work things out, which is always rewarding for both parties. It's also perfect for those in their golden years, who maybe aren't as keen or able to bomb around an obstacle course or go for a two-hour trek!



Sensory & Cognition

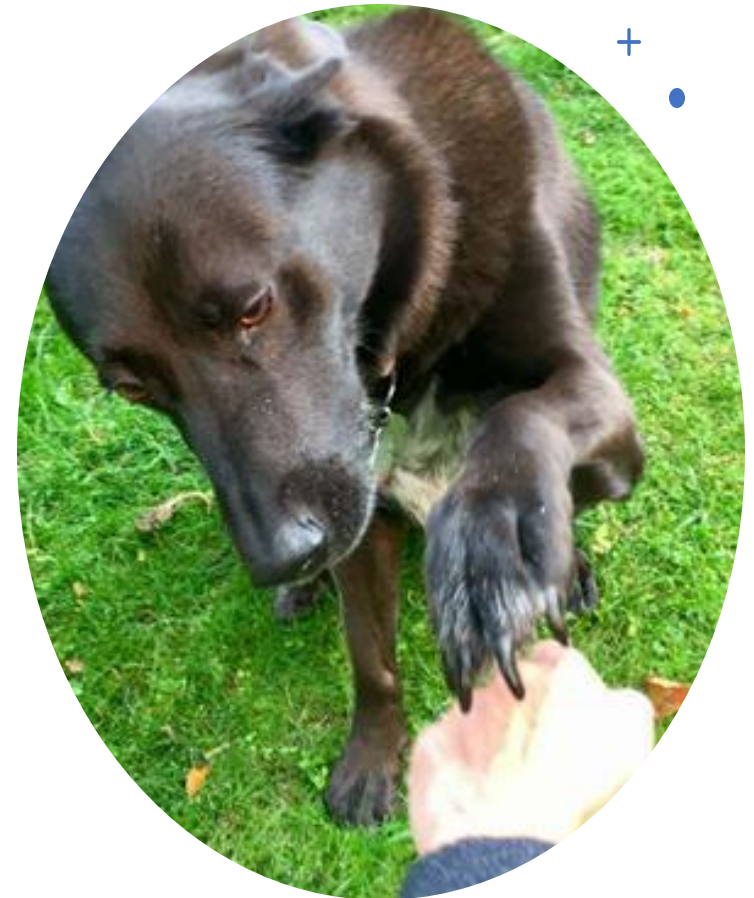
- *Scent Trails & Novel Smells* – dogs see the world through their noses, so anything new to sniff and get their schnoz's into is going to provide great stimulation. Coined as a 'sniffari', you can do this when out on a walk by simply letting your dog follow his nose instead of a route you've planned or create a trail at home (inside or out). You could use things like herbs, perfumes, the smell of your clothing... just make sure anything you introduce is non-toxic. Happy sniffing!

- *The Plant Pot Game* – this is super easy and can be done outside or in, and you don't necessarily have to use plant pots; whatever you have around the house/ garden that isn't too heavy will work. Simply put a treat under a select plant pot, or pots, and let your dog sniff them out. It's totally up to you how many pots you use, or how many have treats under them, but it's a good idea to start out easy with just a few, and make the treats high value so your dog gets a lovely reward for sniffing them out.



Sensory & Cognition

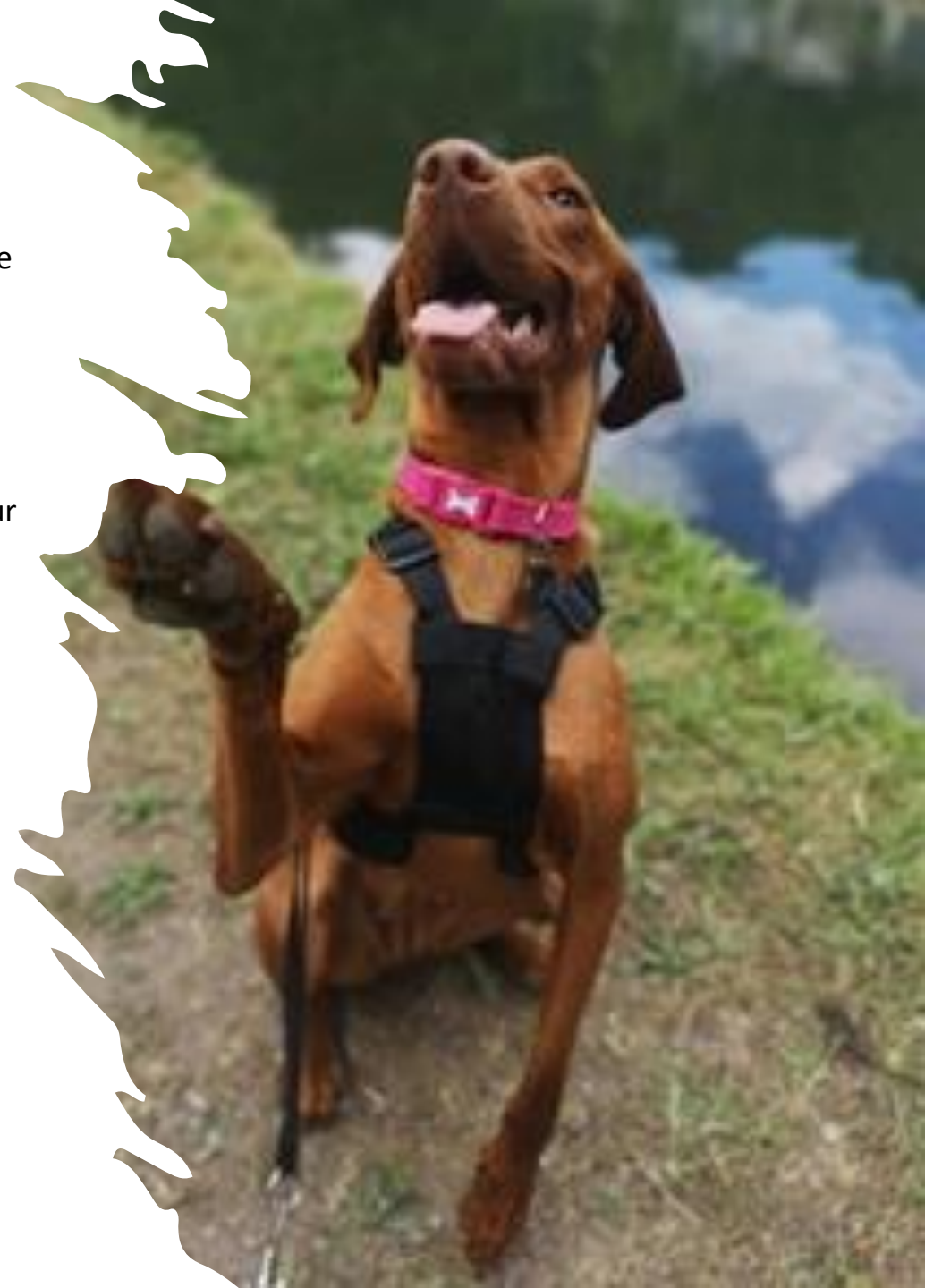
- *Sensory Garden* – similar to a ‘sniffari’, you can create a fun sensory environment in the smallest of gardens with just a few additions that you can rejig whenever you like. A variety of textures, scents and visual changes can all stimulate your dog’s sense of smell and depending on breed or purpose of the garden, their behaviour too. If you’ve got a hyperactive dog or puppy you could introduce lavender, valerian or catnip to promote a sense of calm. Willow is often used by dogs for self medication, grasses such as wheat or barley are great for exploring and according to The Dogs Trust lots of our furry friends enjoy marigolds. (They also note they’re easy to grow... great for those of us that don’t have the greenest of fingers!) If you’re not overly keen on gardening, introducing different textures can also stimulate your dog’s brain. Wood chippings, sand or even just letting a small patch of grass grow long can all give a dog a chance to go foraging for new smells, or you could scatter treats for fun meal times.
- *Which Hand?* – another super simple one to play and pretty self explanatory. Pop a treat in your hand and get your dog to ‘guess’ which one it’s in. Start off easy with some nice smelly high value treats. Once he’s got the hang of it, you can make it as hard or easy as you like; introduce height or speed to the game to keep his brain busy.



Sensory & Cognition

- *Target/ Hand Touch Training* – this is a great way to focus your friend to touch a specific mark with their nose. You can use a target stick, available online or you can make one yourself which is literally a stick with something like a tennis ball on the end, or have them aim for the palm of your hand. Present the target and when they touch it with their nose give them a big well done and reward. They'll soon learn that they get a treat for 'booping' the target which then means you can introduce a command for the behaviour. Once they've learned that, you could teach your dog to 'target' a range of items. Brilliant for getting their brains ticking.

- *Name the Toys* – this is great even if you have an older dog. Whoever said they can't learn new tricks is barking up the wrong tree! Positive association and repetition are key, and of course a nice reward, whether food based or a bit of play. You can teach your dog the name of a toy simply by repeating it when you hand it to them or they pick it up. Following this you could ask them to find it, and even if they just put their nose on it, give them a big well done! Rewarding your dog every time they correctly identify the toy is super important, and they'll soon learn a fab new trick.



Sensory & Cognition

- *Tidy Up* – if you've decided to have a go at naming toys, this could be incorporated into a game that will make your life so much easier if you've got a million toys scattered about the place. This one is a little more complex, and if I'm honest, I can't fully go through the steps needed in this little section, I'm not here to confuse you! It works along the theory of targeting, so getting your dog to present something at a certain point in order to get a reward. Youtube can give you some instructional videos of how to train this, but be aware that some trainers use aversive or dominance training. Look for 'force free training' or 'positive reinforcement' so your pup has a happy and fun experience. If you're not confident with the online content Take the Lead Services or Paws Playground are happy to give you any tips or advice you need.
- *Massage* – a lot of people might giggle at the idea of giving a dog a massage, but it is clinically proven to help calm and relax, as well as aiding joint issues, blood flow and improve mental wellbeing. It is advisable to seek guidance from a professional about how to go about this, but there are plenty of online courses and tutorials that are accessible for free that can provide basic information if you want to give it a go. Whether it's to calm a whirlwind puppy or give a little relief to an arthritic geriatric, canine massage is an underrated tool that we can use to make our furry friends lives a bit more relaxing. I mean, who doesn't like a massage?!



Thank You!



I hope you guys had fun trying out some new things!

I really appreciate you taking the time to read through this, and if you would like to give any feedback my email address is (embarrassingly):

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or feel free to send me a message on Facebook.

Thank you again!