



Easy, Fun, (Mainly) Free Enrichment

My Favorite Common-Sense Ways to Entertain Your Dog

Enrichment 101:

“Enrichment” is a fancy term for keeping dogs entertained by engaging their brains. Dogs don’t necessarily need long daily walks and lots of exercise.

What they *need* are mental stimulation and outlets to engage in natural behaviors that feel satisfying to them.

This doesn’t mean daily walks and exercise are bad. But these *are* often overrated in discussions around dogs’ needs.

Creating fun enrichment activities for your dog is really very common-sense.

All you need to do is come up with ways for them to engage in “dog” behavior, like digging, sniffing, moving, eating, chasing, seeking, and finding.

Sometimes this might be interactive, like playing tug or fetch. Often, though, dogs can be given activities that are more passive and that they can do by themselves. This is useful for when the humans are sick, busy, or just plain tired; for dogs that can’t do as much physically because of illness or injury; and for dogs that never seem to get tired, even with lots of exercise.

I’m going to share some of my favorite examples, but don’t feel limited! Be creative. The sky’s the limit. These suggestions can serve as a springboard to come up with your own activities!

Also, enrichment doesn’t need to be expensive. You can create fun activities from things you have around the house, and often from things you’d normally recycle or throw away. There are also many options that might not be on hand, but are usually cheap and easy to find.

Stuffed kongs and licky mats are great, but are you ready to go beyond that?

10 Easy, (Almost) Free Activities to Enjoy with Your Pup!

- 1. Ice Prize:** Mix water with a little chicken broth (or any flavor your dog enjoys) and freeze it in an ice cube tray. For a bonus, add a popsicle stick to the middle with a hole in it. This way, you can hang the icy treat from your dog's crate.
- 2. Muffins:** Put treats in a muffin tin, then cap each muffin cup with a tennis ball. Your dog will have to figure out how to remove the balls to get the goods.
- 3. Buried Treasure:** This one is for the dogs who love to dig. Fill up a kiddie pool (or a large bucket, box, or anything else that's big enough) with sand and hide cookies or favorite toys in the dirt.
- 4. Easter Egg Hunt:** Reuse those fillable plastic Easter eggs. Hide treats inside some, and give your dog the challenge of figuring out which ones have treats and which don't. You can put treats in all of them, and hide the eggs all over the house.
- 5. Hide-n-Seek:** Have your dog do a sit/stay while you hide treats around the room, then release them to find them all. For the beginner version, the dog can watch you hide the treats. For the advanced version, make your dog stay around a corner or other visual barrier.
- 6. All Bottled Up:** Pop a few hard treats inside an old plastic water bottle and give it to your dog (with the cap off). This makes a free puzzle toy; enjoy watching your dog bang it around trying to get the treats to fall out!
- 7. Amazon is Awesome:** Free dog toys come with almost every delivery! Boxes, air packs, packing paper...all of these can be fun things to shred and creative ways to hide treats and let your dog unpack the box for hidden treasure. (If your dog is a shredder, monitor to make sure your dog isn't ingesting anything harmful.)
- 8. Towel Game:** Bundle some treats in an old towel or sheet, and let your dog dig it around to get all the goodies. For an advanced version, you can put the towel in a box or a laundry basket.
- 9. Shell Game:** Use tupperwares, cups, or halves of the Easter eggs. Place these over treats. Your dog will have to learn to overturn the items to get the treats. The easy version can be done on carpet or a rug. Then make it harder by doing it on a smooth floor or using things that don't tip easily.
- 10. Ball Pit:** Toss some treats in the bottom of a box or bucket, then fill it up with those Easter eggs. Your dog will have to nose through all the eggs to get the treats. If this is too easy, put the treats in old toilet paper tubes and fold the ends up, and mix those in with the plastic eggs.



Setting Your Pup Up for Success

Remember, not all dogs will immediately understand how to play these games. You may need to work with your dog until they get used to it, showing them what to do and encouraging them, or thinking about ways to make the first few times they play a new game very easy. If they are successful, their confidence will increase, and they will become bolder in trying to figure out new games!