



Behavior and Training Department Tips and Techniques

Kongs™: Home Alone

Stuffed Toys to Keep Your Dog Occupied While You're Gone

Why stuff a toy?

Dogs, by their very nature, are predators, scavengers and opportunists. They are genetically programmed to hunt for their food. Counter surfing, trash can scouring, dinner begging, garden digging and laundry stealing are all outgrowths of an opportunistic scavenger taking advantage of the environment. Often, these are considered behavior problems, when, in fact, they are just evidence that your dog is being a dog. You can actually take advantage of this instinct, and help your dog occupy himself while you're gone.

By giving dogs problems to solve, you stimulate their brains and give them a job to do that they are genetically suited for. When you're home, you can stimulate them by playing tug of war (with rules), playing games like fetch, hide and seek, catch, Frisbee™, and introducing your dog to training tricks and clicker training. All of these are great energy outlets. When you leave your dog at home, you can use toys or bones stuffed with food. The most popular stuffing toy is a "Kong™", but there are now many other similar toys on the market. The stuffed toys can be in addition to your dog's regular meals, or it can actually replace them.

Though you can just stuff a Kong™ type toy with dried cookies or kibble, your dog is likely to get through the toy quickly, and turn his attention elsewhere (like to a tasty rug). If you're a bit more creative, you'll occupy more of his time and give your dog a job. Here are a few ideas to get you started; the more creative you are, the happier your dog will be.

Stuffing Ideas

First, figure out if your dog likes to work for his food, or gives up easily. You can stuff the toy with small food items that fall out with just a tiny bit of work, and let him start with that. Then, stuff one with some of the following, and see whether he will continue to work at the toy until all the food is out. We prefer a hard worker, of course, as he'll spend lots more time trying to figure out how to get that food out of there!

Mixtures, such as peanut butter, cream cheese, canned cheese, mashed potatoes, canned dog food, plain yogurt, cottage cheese, tofu or toddler food can be used to bind smaller bits of food together. You can also use Velveeta™ or Cheese Whiz™ type cheese cubes. Place them in the hole, microwave the toy until the cheese is melted, and add cookies or cubes of Natural Balance™ (a food that comes in a relatively hard tube). COOL thoroughly before giving it to your dog.

Other ways you can make the stuffed toy more interesting to your dog:

- Wrapping the stuffed toy in an old clean diaper, tea towel, hand towel, or tee shirt, and tying the ends off will create a puzzle for the dog. You should increase the level of difficulty as your dog graduates.
- Enclosing the toy in an old oatmeal box, shoebox, margarine container or other container you don't mind being taken apart, increases the puzzle aspect.
- Hiding the stuffed toy around the house or yard will key into their genetic hard wiring to hunt around for their food. At first, hide the toy in rather obvious places, and gradually make him work harder to find it (or them).
- Harder and advanced stuffing for the creative hunter in your home begins with plugging the small hole with peanut butter. Then, add cubed meat, cooled chicken or beef broth, cookies, Natural Balance™, or whatever, and freezing the toy to make a sort of popsicle. *This should be given to dogs outside or in a room that can be cleaned easily. This can get messy!*



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For the Ph. D. dog in your home, layering the Kong™ and sealing the big end of it is really challenging and can give him hours of doggie delights. Pack these as tightly as possible. The last piece in should be a sealer piece, such as a dried apricot, cheese ravioli or tortellini.

- Layer 1 is the deepest and can include anything of really high value, like freeze dried liver bits.
- Layer 2 can contain anything you want – perhaps dog kibble, cookies, liver biscotti pieces, Cheerios™ cereal, peanut butter, or dried banana chips.
- Layer 3 suggestions are baby carrot sticks cut to the appropriate size (so your dog won't choke), celery, turkey, chicken, left over meats, dried apples or apricots.

For dogs on a diet, you can substitute crumbled rice cake, plain croutons, salt free/fat free cream cheese, peanut butter, tofu or yogurt.

Have fun stuffing your toy – your dog will have fun getting it out – and he *won't* be stealing food from the garbage!

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