

Does your dog need enrichment?

Behavioural or environmental enrichment is simply anything that provides your dog with an activity, item of interest, change in the environment etc. in fact anything that enriches your dogs day. Providing enrichment means your dog/s will have less time to be bored, anxious or develop/engage in destructive behaviours. It is easy and does not have to be expensive as you will see. I provide my dogs with a minimum of five different items per day. An important word of warning though - **Always supervise your dog at all times when giving new items to ensure they cannot chew up or ingest the item. Choose appropriate items for the 'chewing' level of your individual dogs.**

To minimize the dogs competing for the enrichment items you can train each dog to go to a different area of the yard to find their items or use visual barriers to hide things behind. You can also hammer some wooden stakes into the ground around the perimeter of your yard and attach 1.2 metre long wire rope with clips to tether the enrichment items to the stakes. This prevents your dogs from taking and hoarding items. Space stakes at least 3 metres apart. If you have dogs of different abilities and sizes you can take advantage of this also by providing items that a particular dog can use or reach eg one of my dogs can open cardboard boxes while the other can't. With height differences you can place some items up high. Be creative and think outside the square so that your dogs can be enriched while you are away. Here are ideas for things that you can give your dogs when you go out:

Cardboard boxes (any size from small to large) - put in treats, bone, raw egg, kibble or biscuits inside box and close box up so dog has to break it open. Hide it around the yard.



Treat balls – Buy from any pet shop/warehouse.

Massive variety available. Begin with ball on easy setting until your dog has learnt how to get treats out and then make it harder. Can put part of daily kibble ration, treats, broken up biscuits etc inside the ball.



Kongs – Buy one or two and stuff with treats, kibble, cheese etc. Get black Kongs for destructive chewers. Make it hard by topping off with crisscrossed biscuits, peanut butter or low fat cream cheese.

Raw egg – can hide it in boxes or simply hide somewhere in the yard. Give only 1 per week

Chicken wings/ drumsticks and necks – I use the wings and drums to signal to my dogs that I am going out – I generally hand feed these or place them in a cardboard box. Hide the chicken necks around the yard. Chicken must be fed raw and should only be fed to dogs that will chew rather than gulp these down whole.

Plastic bottles – use the PET type as they are tough and not brittle. Put biscuits, kibble and treats inside the bottles and hide these around the yard.



Tetra paks – these are also great to put treats/kibble inside. They are fairly tough and so your dog has to work fairly hard to get food out.

Huge variety of toys – squeaky toys, plush toys, balls from tennis ball size up to soccer ball size, rope toys. There is a huge variety out there. Rotate toys 2 – 3 times per week and give 5- 7 toys at a time. Build up your toy collection so your dog only has the same toy once per month.



Dried meat treats kangaroo jerky, pigs ears, trotters, etc – again there is a huge variety of chew treats available from pet stores. They can provide hours of chewing and can also be hidden in boxes or around the yard.

Iceblocks – In Summer, you can keep your dog busy with an iceblock – you can make ice blocks out of diluted ‘pet’ milk, sandwich tuna, meat stock etc. Freeze in ice cream containers, the bigger they are the longer they last.



Daily exercise – long walks, games, hiking, dog parks, training etc. Yes getting out and about with your dog is essential and should form a big part of any enrichment program and indeed part of every dogs daily life. For destructive dogs, a 30 – 45 minute walk before you go to work is great as it releases a lot of the energy that your dog would normally use to be destructive once you leave. If you can’t squeeze a walk into an already busy morning then you must make time to walk after work. Most dogs do well with a minimum 30 – 60 minute walk every day. Vary where you walk to keep it interesting for both of you eg I have 10 different walks that I do in my neighborhood plus I visit the dog park three times a week for 60 – 90 minutes. You can also get involved in activities like flyball, agility or lure coursing + other activities that your breed is designed for.

The important thing is to make sure you do not give the same things every day. Mix them up, rotate them and be inventive. Try to make things hard for your dogs as they get better at finding things around the yard or accessing the treats etc. All animals habituate to things, which mean that the more your dogs get something, the less likely they is to react to it. Keep them constantly guessing at what you have given them today.

The benefits of providing enrichment to your dogs from day 1, is that they learn that these items are OK to chew, rip up etc. Your dogs have an outlet for chewing, mouthing and playing. I have found that my dogs are not destructive at all. Plus by giving the enrichment items to your dogs when you go to work or go out, helps the dogs to focus on something other than the fact that you have gone and because these things are fun, your dogs will actually enjoy you leaving just so they get something special.

