



## Keeping Your Dog Busy and Happy

*The following client education material may be reproduced with permission from Dr. Gabrielle Carter (phone: 0433 151730, email: gabrielle.carter@advancedvetcare.com.au).*

Due to the busy lifestyles that many of us lead, dogs can spend many hours at home alone each day, and left to their own devices will find ways to entertain themselves – this can lead to behavioural problems. So, when you are going to be away for a while make sure your dog has something to keep her busy. Below are some ideas. Take care to ensure there is no danger to your dog or others when engaging in any of these activities.

Environmental enrichment is only half the story. Dogs are social animals and a normal, well-adjusted dog also requires quality time with you every day. Make time for this. Also, on top of adequate mental stimulation, don't forget about some physical exercise appropriate to your dog's needs. Walks off the home property should involve both time for sniffing and nosing around, as well as aerobic exercise.

### **BIRD FEEDER**

The height and location needs to be such that the birds do not get caught or injured. Put out some breakfast scraps before going to work each morning. Some dogs will simply sit and watch the bird activity, others will occasionally charge, so the birds are startled, fly off and drop the food (which gets "hoovered" up), and others won't let a bird near it all day. The occasional terrier will try and work out how to climb up the pole!

### **ICEBLOCK**

Place some suitable food in an ice-cream container, fill with water, and freeze. Alternatively freeze a toy like a knotted rope in some water. As the ice melts, toys and treats become available for your dog.

### **DIGGING PIT**

For dogs that love to dig, provide a suitable area where they can dig. Encourage them to dig in this area by burying treats, food, toys, etc in the digging pit. Start by burying objects shallowly, gradually burying them deeper each day and making retrieval more difficult.

### **FOR BUSYBODIES**

Some dogs just love to know what's going on in the world. So, provide some peepholes in fences, or perhaps a raised platform. A backyard with no entertainment and no view is a bit like a prison cell.

### **WADING POOL**

Some dogs love water. If yours is one of them then why not encourage it by providing a wading pool. Children's plastic molded pools are cheap and work well. Ensure that your dog can easily get in and out of the pool and that it is just paddling depth. Drop some treats or toys in the pool and encourage your dog to play. Chopped vegetables such as carrot float and can be added fun.

### **FOOD DISPENSING TOYS**

Consider feeding your dog all her meals from food dispensing items like those listed below. Remember to rotate the toys on a daily basis to maintain novelty.

#### **THE KONG®**

"Kongs" are a great, durable toy. They can be stuffed with food and left for your dog to work on during the day. Fill them with particularly sticky stuff, like peanut butter, and dogs will spend hours trying to lick out that last little bit. Be aware of fighting over food if you have more than one dog.

#### **BUSTER CUBE®**

The "Buster Cube" is another great invention. You place dry food in the center of the cube and the dog must push it around in order to get the food to fall out. It can take a little training before your dog works it out, but it can occupy some dogs for long periods of time.

#### **TUG-A-JUG®**

This is another great food dispensing toy, which your dog learns to toss around to free the dry treats (liver, dry food) from inside.

#### **BUSY-BUDDY TWIST AND TREAT®**

A flying saucer shaped toy you can fill with dry or sticky treats. Your dogs learns to toss it around to release dry treats, or lie down and find ways to lick out sticky contents

### **BOB-A-LOT®**

Another toy you can fill with treats and your dog learns to toss it around to release the yummy contents.

### **THE “HOME ALONE”**

This is another quality toy that is great for dogs that love a game of “tug-of-war”. It consists of a tough cloth handle attached to an elastic, “bunty” type cord. As the dog pulls, the elastic recoil provides a resisting tension. It has the added feature of a ball attached to the cord, into which you can put dry food. As the dog pulls on the handle, food falls out, and your dog’s efforts are rewarded. Your dog can occupy herself by tugging, then nibbling up the treats. These toys are not cheap, but are very durable. They are available from Aussie Dog ([www.aussiedog.com.au](http://www.aussiedog.com.au)), and good pet stores.

### **TREASURE HUNT**

Leave your dog in the house (making sure she can’t peek outside) while you go into the garden and hide food, treats or toys. Partially bury some and put others under or inside other articles. Let your dog out and allow her to ‘hunt’ for her meal. Start by making it easy for her to find things, so she gets the hang of it, then start really making her work for the rewards.

### **HUNTING FOR DINNER**

Before leaving for work in the morning, or going out to dinner in the evening, throw your dog a meal of dry food. Simply throw it into the garden or over the lawn. That should keep her busy for a while!

### **THE TERMINATOR**

For the dog that destroys! Why not provide her with something cheap to destroy – a soft toy from a fete or op shop (beware of plastic eyes and stuffing contents that might be swallowed and obstruct the gut), or even a cardboard box (if you don’t mind cleaning up the pieces afterwards). Be careful with dogs that ingest foreign material, and avoid any dangerous materials