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Environmental Enrichment for Dogs

Feral dogs spend the majority of their day searching for food. By feeding dogs in the regular routine that most of us do, we take care of that in a couple of minutes a day. This leaves a large amount of mental and physical stimulation unaccounted for in a dog's daily activity. In order to adequately care for our dogs, we need to provide other outlets for this mental and physical activity level. One way that we can do this is by providing opportunities for environmental enrichment. This is not just about entertaining your dog but about providing outlets for many of their natural behaviors that we often ignore or have no normal outlets for within the home. With no outlet for these normal behavior patterns in dogs, many can develop behavior problems including some compulsive disorders, acral-lick dermatitis and certain types of aggression.

Dogs should receive as much of their daily ration of food through training or enrichment devices as possible. This mimics a dog's natural environment because they work for their food. Rotate as many of the toys as possible. Not every dog will want to play with or participate in each activity. Also keep in mind if you have a dog that tends to eat certain types of toys, then use those types only under supervision (or not at all). In addition, special care needs to be taken for dogs with resource guarding issues. Their need for enrichment is no different, but steps need to be taken to keep them and their housemates as safe as possible.

- 1) Busy Buddy line of toys by Premier
 - a. You can find more information at <http://store.petsafe.net/toys>. The Busy Buddy line of toys provides a variety of enrichment devices. If your dog has never had an enrichment toy, you might consider starting with Kibble Nibble.

- 2) Kongs, Kong Wobbler, Buster Cubes
 - a. These are similar ideas to the Busy Buddy toys but provide variety to your feeding and treat routine.
- 3) Scatter food through the house or out in the yard and have your dog search for his/her food.
- 4) Hide food in plastic water bottles and have the dog work to get the food out.
- 5) Baby pool
 - a. Some dogs love to swim or play in water.
 - b. Also, you can turn the baby pool in to a sandbox if your dog likes to dig.
 - c. Hide toys in either the water or sand and have your dog search for the toys.
- 6) Dig area
 - a. Some dogs like to dig. Provide an area where your dog can dig in your yard. Delineate this area well by placing barriers around it so your dog can learn the boundaries easily.
- 7) Provide chew items for your dog.
 - a. These can include CET chew, Antlerz or other types of chews that your dog can digest. I recommend that these be used with some level of supervision.
- 8) Stuffed toys.
 - a. Many dogs tear these apart – that's ok! That is actually what they are intended to do. Just be sure your dog is not consuming them. Sew them back together or toss them out and buy new ones when your dog does destroy one.
- 9) Hang a tire or other types of toy from a tree for your dog to play with outside.
- 10) Fruits, veggies and other treats
 - a. You can hide these throughout the yard or house. Have your dog search for these as treats.
 - b. Some dogs like heads of lettuce – they can play with them as a ball, shred them and eat them.
 - c. Please be sure not to use grapes or raisins.
- 11) Scents
 - a. Provide various scents for dogs to search for through the yard and house. You may be able to find synthetic animal scents at outdoor stores.