

Enrichment Toys

What is it?

There are a myriad of dog toys on the market that can stimulate your dog's brain by requiring the dog to "solve a problem." The built-in challenge is how to get the treats out of the puzzle.

- Generally, these toys are made of hard, yet chewable, rubberized material or high-impact plastic and so are very durable.
- They come in all shapes and sizes and range from the fairly simple stuffed/treat dispensing toy – the dog gnaws and chews the treats out or the dog pushes the toy around and treats fall out – to more complex puzzles – the dog has to find out where the treat is hidden by lifting, sliding or moving parts of the toy.
- In addition to toys available in the commercial marketplace, there are many examples on YouTube™ of homemade brain toys for dogs.

What is it for?

The purpose of these toys is to stimulate your dog's brain and give him something to do. The reason these toys work for the dog is they tap into and stimulate your dog's natural instinct to hunt for food. In the process of getting the food out, your dog can chew, paw, nose and otherwise do whatever needs to be done to get to that treat!

Some of the treat dispensing toys and puzzles are designed to keep your dog occupied while you are busy with something else. If the toy does not have any small pieces (such as a stuffed toy), you can give it to your dog to play with while you are gone. Please note that some dogs are so destructive that they can only be left with the most durable of toys.

How do you use it?

All of these toys require the use of treats to encourage and stimulate your dog to play with them. In order to prevent your dog from becoming overweight, consider the contents of the toys to be a meal, or a portion of a regular meal, and so decrease the amount you give your dog for his "normal" meal. Also, if your dog gulps down his meals, these toys can be used to slow him down by requiring him to work at getting the food out.

Types of Enrichment Toys:

Toys You Stuff:

- These come in many sizes and shapes. The Kong® is a "stuffable" toy. You fill it with treats, plug the opening with peanut butter, cream cheese or other gooey substance and give it to your dog. For the first time or two, make it fairly easy for your dog to get the treats out. Don't stuff it too tightly.
- After your dog gets the idea that the Kong® is full of good stuff, you can make it a little harder for your dog to get the treats out. You can do this by putting in layers: the bottom is kibble, then something semi-soft such as cut up hotdogs or chicken, which can be stuffed in fairly tightly, and the plug of peanut butter. Put it in the freezer to further increase the challenge.



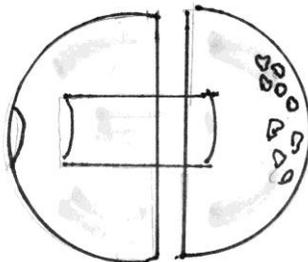
- As your dog gets better at getting the treats out, you can continue making the game harder by wrapping the toy in a small towel, placing it in a box, or hiding it somewhere in the yard.
- Possible stuffing items: kibble, freeze dried chicken, hot dogs, cottage cheese, fruit, steamed carrots or string cheese. Please clean these toys after each use.
- If you keep multiple stuffed toys in the freezer you'll always have one "ready to go."

Treat Dispensing Toys:

- These also come in various sizes and shapes.
- A common property of this type of toy is that the dog has to move it around with his muzzle or paws so the treats will come out of a particular opening on the toy. These openings may be a special shape or size, which can increase the challenge of getting the treat out. The treats are usually hard or semi-soft so they will move around and fall out.
- Most of the toys are adjustable, allowing you to start out with an easy challenge and gradually work up to a more difficult challenge for the dog.



Puzzle or Treat-Hiding Toys:



- These toys are puzzles and the dog has to lift, slide or somehow move a smaller piece to reveal a treat that the dog then eats!
- Often there are several hiding places within the puzzle and the dog can try to find each one before the puzzle is restocked for the next round.
- It is important to start with the "easy" puzzle so your dog learns what to do, then gradually increase the difficulty.

Common Uses:

- Stuffed toys can be used to help your dog cope with being home alone. They give the dog something to do that taps into his natural instinct of hunting for food. Your dog is chewing and gnawing on the toy rather than rugs, furniture and doors.
- Stuffed toys can also help with barking issues when the dog is home alone by keeping him occupied – especially as you are leaving. Your leaving becomes a fun time because a yummy treat is coming!
- Stuffed toys and treat dispensing toys can keep your dog occupied while you are doing something else – getting ready for a party, cleaning house, watching television or just taking a nap!
- Treat hiding puzzles can stimulate your dog's problem solving abilities as you look on. It can be very rewarding and interesting to watch your dog try to figure out the puzzle. It can help build a special bond between you, since you are part of the game.

Safety Concerns:

Toys You Stuff:

- Make sure the stuffed toy is an appropriate size and durability for your dog. Stuffed toys are supposed to be chewed and gnawed on. They should be large enough so your dog cannot get it all the way in his mouth. They should be tough enough so your dog doesn't chew it up too quickly. When the material gets soft and starts breaking apart it is time to get a new one.
- Some treat dispensing toys have an inner compartment that holds the treats and is surrounded by a web of plastic to keep them out of the dog's reach. If an unsupervised dog chews through the outer web, the dog could become injured.
- These toys should not be put out in a common area with unsupervised dogs. Food fights may occur!

Puzzle or Treat-Hiding Toys:

- Unsupervised dogs should not use these toys. They are made of high impact plastic or wood and they usually have many small pieces that a dog can chew and swallow.

Training Resources:

Marin Humane's **Behavior & Training Consultants** are available for consultations (on-site or in-home) regarding the behavior modification uses of Enrichment Toys at 415.506.6280 or OhBeHAVE@MarinHumane.org.

Enrichment Toys are available for purchase at the Marin Humane **Animal Outfitters Store**. Stop by our store or visit us online at: [Animal Outfitters](#). Please call 415.506.6229 to verify available stock.

Remember to license your dog (It's the LAW)! If your dog gets lost, a license tag on your dog's collar is the fastest way to reunite you and your dog. Even if your dog is microchipped, a license tag is immediately visible and doesn't require a scanning device to read. For more information about licensing, microchipping, and other services provided by **Marin Humane**, visit us at MarinHumane.org or stop by at 171 Bel Marin Keys Blvd, Novato, CA.

