

# Golden Oldies



Dogs are meant to live active lives, rather than sleep until their owners come home. Many studies have shown that enriching an animal's environment improves the psychological and physical well-being of animals. Dogs need both mental and physical exercise to be balanced and healthy.

Dogs want to use their brains! They have wonderfully intelligent, creative brains that need to be challenged and stretched to help prevent boredom-related behaviour issues. Using some of the ideas listed will not only help dogs' brains, but will also improve relationships with our dogs.

Read on for some simple, practical ways to provide enrichment for your dog each day. Note that all dogs are individuals, so not all of these activities will appeal equally to all dogs. The key is to experiment and find what works for you and your dog.

**Social enrichment** provides opportunities for your dog to spend time in new, different environments:

- Take them to the beach, walk a different route around the neighbourhood etc
- Wait on the corner of an intersection and watch the foot and road traffic go by

Social enrichment is easy to provide even if you're a working pet parent. Occasional drop-in visits from a pet sitter can give your dog the opportunity for an extra play session midday. For bored or restless dogs, daycare can be a good option, too. Even if it's not every day, it gives your dog something to look forward to during the week.

**Cognitive enrichment** provides opportunities for thinking and problem-solving:

- Puzzle toys - there are many types to choose from. Fantastic for dogs that are constantly busy and need a job between meals
- Hide and seek. Ask your dog to stay, and then run and hide from your pet before calling them. This also builds a strong recall! Treat generously when your dog finds you. Hide toys and treats around the house and garden and ask your dog to find them
- Ice sculptures – bowl or bucket or bottom half of a gallon jug – fill with water, toys, treats (carrots and apples work really well!) – freeze – put outside for your dog to play with, interact with, get the toys and treats out of

- Boxes – start with one box, put some treats or a favourite toy in it, have your dog get the treats/toy out of the box. Progress to nesting boxes with the treats/toy in the innermost box. (This can also be used to feed meals.) Make it more interesting by using peanut butter, spray cheese, or cream cheese in one of the boxes
- Yoga mat – unroll, sprinkle treats, roll back up. Have your dog unroll the mat and get treats
- Small round basket – put treats or a toy under the upturned basket and have your dog figure out how to get them
- Perches – phone books covered in duct tape or small, stable stools. Play with different things your dog can do with these. Two paws on (front, back, right, left), four paws on, two paws on move around, etc

**Physical enrichment** enhances the animal's living space by changing or adding complexity to the environment:

- Provide a bury/dig pit. This is simple. Buy a dog or kiddie pool and fill it up with sand. You can even hide toys and treats for your dogs to dig up. Remember to cover it overnight or when not in use so the local cats don't use it as a new loo!
- Blanket forts and tents. Children enjoy this as well!
- Pop-up tunnel. Similar to what's used in agility, these can be purchased online, and dogs love tearing through them in the backyard
- Musical chairs – play music, play with your dog, when the music stops ask your dog to execute a behaviour on a mat or a rug, when the music starts again, play again

**Sensory enrichment** that stimulates any of the five senses:

- Bubbles, bubbles, and bubbles! You can even buy bacon-flavoured bubbles for dogs.
- Herbs and spices. Mint and cinnamon are not toxic and can be added to pet toys to encourage sniffing
- Farm animal scents. Give a friend with goats or horses an old tee shirt to hang in the barn for a few days. Bring it home and tie it to a tug toy
- Wind chimes can be fun toys that offer new sounds to cats and dogs

**Feeding enrichment** makes mealtime more challenging and interesting. Try to feed at least one meal a day in a mentally stimulating and challenging way:

- Treats under a blanket. Simple—just hide them out of sight!

- A puzzle feeder or slow feeder bowl can slow down gulpers and stimulate the mind
- Put the food in an empty, dry (labels, rings and caps removed) plastic soft drink bottles, milk jugs, water bottles. Try egg cartons, PVC pipe with holes drilled in it or bottles hung with string. Be creative!
- Muffin tin ball feeder. Cheapest nosework game you'll find. Literally, put tennis balls or scrunched up paper balls in the muffin tin and hide food under some of the balls
- Make or buy a snuffle mat and scatter kibble in it...here is a link to instructions about how to make your own <https://www.mycraftydog.com/blog/diy-snuffle-mat-for-your-dog-or-rescue-group>
- Try a lick mat spread with peanut butter
- KONGs are not toys, they are feeding vessels so USE THEM! The classic KONG, KONG wobbler and KONG Quests series are all options for feeding a meal

### **The bottom line**

Enrichment doesn't take a lot of time or money. Many of these ideas are low maintenance and take just a few minutes, but will go a long way with your dogs. Try a few, see which work, and then weave them into your dog's routine. Add in some enrichment to your dog's life TODAY

If you are on Facebook there are a couple of Groups worth joining to give you more ideas:

Canine Enrichment Group : <https://www.facebook.com/groups/canineenrichment/>

DIY Canine Enrichment Toys : <https://www.facebook.com/groups/DIYCanineEnrichment/>