

Enrichment activities for your dog

Dogs like to work for their food, and you can harness this desire by including various enrichment opportunities in your dog's day. Enrichment activities help your dog rehearse passive, calm activities rather than making inappropriate destructive choices.

Behavioural or environmental enrichment means any activity, item of interest or change in the environment that enhances the quality of your dog's day. Providing enrichment ensures your dog will rehearse calm activities and not engage in destructive behaviours. It is easy and does not require expensive equipment, as you will see.

Cardboard boxes

Use any size box but remove staples and sticky tape. Put treats, bone, raw egg, kibble or biscuits inside and close the box so the dog has to break it open to earn the rewards. To up the challenge, put a box inside another box.

Food puzzles

Available from many pet shops, begin with the puzzle on an easy setting until your dog has learnt how to get treats out and then make it harder. Use their daily food allowance inside the puzzle. This activity is a great way to occupy your dog indoors during bad weather or when recovering from injury.



Kongs

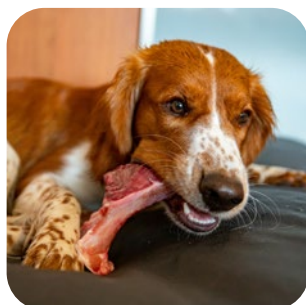
Buy one or two and stuff it with food. Get black Kongs for destructive chewers. Increase the challenge by packing the food more tightly or freezing the contents.

Raw egg

Give your dog with an egg outside and see if they can figure out what to do with it. Hide an egg inside a cardboard box.

Raw bones

Always use raw bones and supervise your dog to ensure they chew the bone and not gulp it down! Hide them inside a box, wrap them in paper or give them as part of your daily feeding routine.



Chicken wings, drumsticks, necks and frames

As with bones, any chicken products must be raw and uncooked. Give age-appropriate pieces to your dog and supervise them while they enjoy this natural feeding activity.

Tetra Paks

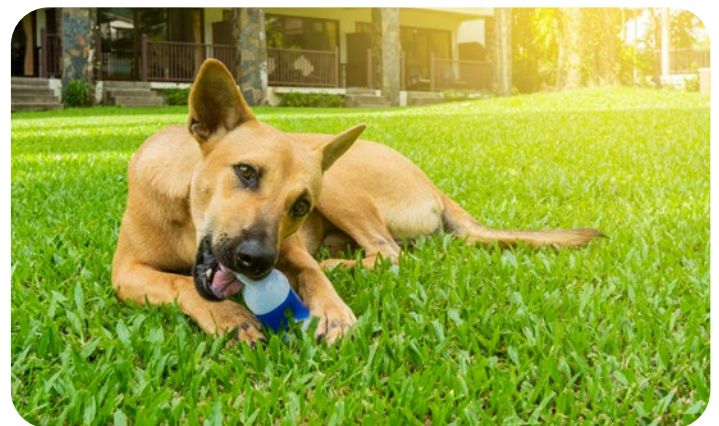
These are great to fill with treats and kibble. They are pretty tough, so your dog must work reasonably hard to get the food out.

Cardboard rolls

Save those cardboard rolls from around your home. Fill them with food rewards and crimp the ends to provide hidden treats and calm feeders when needed.

Plastic bottles

Use the PET type, as they are tough and not brittle. Put some of your dog's daily food allowance inside the bottle (kibble, broken biscuits, chopped dried meat) and give the bottle to your dog without the lid.



Dried meats

Kangaroo jerky, pig ears, trotters – these items provide many hours of chewing and stress relief. Hide these treats in boxes, cardboard tubes or around the garden to up the challenge.

Snuffle mats and scatter feeding

A snuffle mat or a lush lawn can make a great enrichment activity. You encourage your dog to use its nose to snuffle and hunt for the food pieces by scattering food. This activity is a great arousal down activity and stress reliever. Use it when you arrive home or have visitors.



Lick mats

Licking food from lick mats is another enrichment activity that promotes passive calmness and can help bring stress levels down. Always supervise your dog when using lick mats to prevent inappropriate chewing.



Toys

There is a wide variety of toys available for your dog. When leaving toys out, ensure they are indestructible and safe for your dog. To keep things fresh, rotate toys throughout the week and withhold some toys from your dog.

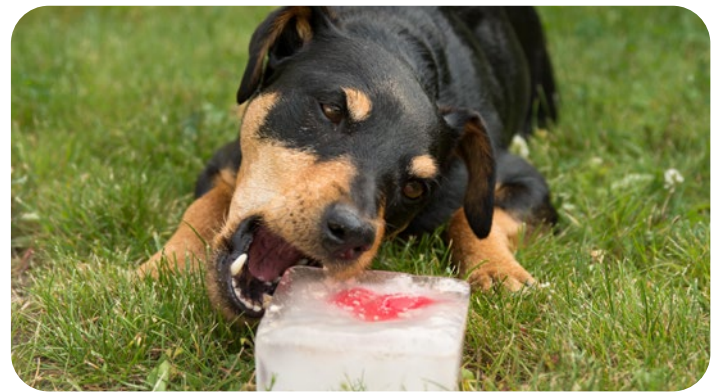
Pine cones

Find opened cones and stuff with kibble and other food items. These are great items to hide in the garden for your dog to find throughout the day.



Iceblocks

Keep your dog busy with an iceblock. Make iceblocks from liquids like diluted pet milk, sandwich tuna, meat stock or plain water. You can add fruit or vegetables inside. Freeze in ice cube trays, larger containers or Kong's. Remember, the bigger they are, the longer they last. This is also a great way to keep your dog cool during the warmer months.



Tips and tricks

- Provide your dog with multiple enrichment activities per day that use a multitude of their senses and skills.
- Supervise your dog when introducing new enrichment items to prevent inappropriate chewing or swallowing.
- Choose age-appropriate enrichment activities for the chewing and licking level of your dog. Once your dog understands how to interact with the enrichment item, you can leave them out when you leave home or whenever you need your dog to engage in a calmness activity.
- When introducing an enrichment activity to your dog, ensure that your dog understands how to interact with the object and that they can complete any puzzle elements. For example, don't make cardboard boxes impossible to open, as your dog will give up in frustration. Enrichment should make your dog's life more fun and enjoyable, not more difficult.
- Keep a tally on the amount of food your dog consumes in their enrichment, and subtract that from their daily food allowance to ensure they are not overfed.

