

# Enrichment for your pet



Pet Professional Guild of Australia  
- Member Resource Tool  
<http://www.ppgaaustralia.net.au>

**Responsible pet owners are only too aware that their dog requires regular appropriate exercise. It is important to note however, that mental stimulation is just as vital in regards to pet welfare.**

Our busy urban lives often do not leave a lot of time for our family pet. Pets are often left for long hours during the day while we are at work. Dogs' lives need to be enriched and they need to be entertained to keep the mind busy, alleviate boredom, and stop destruction around the home.

A dog that has jobs to do on a daily basis is often far more content and relaxed than a dog that is left to occupy themselves. This means providing your pets with interactive activities to keep them busy throughout the day, and tire them out, so that they sleep rather than create havoc in the backyard or home while you are away at work.

Behavioural or environmental enrichment is anything that provides your dog with an activity, item of interest, change in the environment etc. - anything enriching your dog's day.

Providing enrichment means your dog/s will have less time to be bored, anxious or develop/engage in destructive behaviours. It is easy and does not have to be expensive. Provide your dog with a minimum of five different items per day. An important word of warning though – **Always supervise your dog at all times when giving new items to ensure they cannot chew up or ingest the item. Choose appropriate items for the 'chewing' level of your individual dog. Avoid leaving bones (always raw) for your dog before going out as unsupervised they could be a choking hazard.**

## Food

How you feed your dog is extremely important, not only in maintaining physical health but helping to maintain mental health as well. The most important job your dog can do is to work for their food. It is important to ensure you are aware of your dog's total food intake for the day so you don't overfeed.

Remember to have a container filled each day with your dog's total portion of meal. Leave the container where everyone in the home can see it and ensure they only take from that container on a daily basis. If you give your dog a bone, you must remove some of their biscuits. (e.g. a fresh small/medium bone with some meat = 1 cup).

## Hand feeding

Each day you could work on exercises you have either completed, or are doing in your training class with your Pet Professional Guild trainer. Use some of your dog's kibble or fresh meat and ask them to complete exercises such as sit, drop, come when called, and any other exercises suitable for your situation. Pay from the hand one bit at a time or in small amounts.

You could hide their food – leave a biscuit trail leading around the backyard to where you hid the food at first so that your dog can find it. This way your pet learns the Hansel and Gretel game. This will keep them hunting all day!

If you have more than one dog, in order to minimise the dogs competing for the items, you can train each dog to go to a different area of the yard to find their items or use visual barriers to hide things behind. You can also hammer some wooden stakes into the ground around the perimeter of your yard and attach 1.2 metre long wire rope with clips to tether the enrichment items to the stakes. This prevents your dogs from taking and hoarding items. Space stakes at least 3 metres apart. If you have dogs of different abilities and sizes you can take advantage of this also by providing items that a particular dog can use or reach



eg. one may be able to open cardboard boxes, whilst the other cannot. With height differences you can place some items up high. Be creative and think outside the square so that your dogs can be enriched while you are away.

### Scatter Feeding

It's just like feeding chickens! Just grab a handful of biscuits and scatter them over the ground and let your dog go for it. This can be a very simple exercise to begin with (simply drop onto the ground) or very hard (broadcast over the yard or patio). Be aware that if your dog starts digging to search for treats in the grass, simply scatter onto non-grassed areas instead.

### Here are ideas for things that you can give your dogs when you go out:

**Cardboard boxes** (any size from small to large) - put in treats, raw egg, kibble or biscuits inside box and close box up so dog has to break it open. Hide it around the yard.



**Treat balls** – Buy from any pet shop/warehouse. Massive variety available. Begin with ball on easy setting until your dog has learnt how to get treats out and then make it harder. Can put part of daily kibble ration, treats, broken up biscuits etc inside the ball. eg. Buster Cubes

**Kongs** – Buy one or two and stuff with treats, kibble, cheese etc. Get black Kongs for destructive chewers. Make it hard by topping off with crisscrossed biscuits, peanut butter or low fat cream cheese. Take a look at this great site for stuffing ideas! <http://www.kongstuffing.com>. For more information on Kongs and recipes, check out the web site at [www.kongcompany.com](http://www.kongcompany.com)



**Plastic bottles** – use the PET type as they are tough and not brittle. Put biscuits, kibble and treats inside the bottles and hide these around the yard.

**Tetra paks** – these are also great to put treats/kibble inside. They are fairly tough and so your dog has to work fairly hard to get food out.

**Scents** – Another great way to change your dog's world a little is to place items around your yard or home that have different smells on them. If you have a friend that has a dog, swap some toys or other dog items every so often, try taking something to work with you for a week or leaving one of your dog's toys in your car and then hide it around the yard for your dog to find and inspect.



**Huge variety of toys** – squeaky toys, plush toys, balls from tennis ball size up to soccer ball size, rope toys. There is a huge variety out there. Rotate toys 2 – 3 times per week and give 5- 7 toys at a time. Build up your toy collection so your dog only has the same toy once per month.

**Dried meat treats** –kangaroo jerky, pigs ears, trotters, etc – again there is a huge variety of chew treats available from pet stores. They can provide hours of chewing and can also be hidden in boxes or around the yard.

**Iceblocks** – In Summer, you can keep your dog busy with an iceblock. Freeze in ice cream containers – the bigger they are the longer they last. You're only limited by imagination: leftover meat or pan juices; carrot, apple and watermelon; dog biscuits, sardines in oil; maybe even a toy, such as a Kong, and fill with water or stock, then freeze. Experiment with freezing a rope into it and hanging it from a tree or veranda post and make your dog really work!



**Digging/Sand Pit** – Some dogs love to dig. If your dog is one of these, provide an area where they can dig and reinforce this natural behaviour. Kids' clam shell pools can be used as a sandpit (or pool) where you bury bones (when home), treats and toys.

**Wading Pool** – Some dogs adore water so why not encourage it. You can purchase a shallow kids' clam shell pool quite cheaply, or alternatively make your own pond. Ensure that your dog can easily get out of the pond and that it is just paddling depth, then drop some toys or treats, even vegetables such as carrot pieces or whole apples which will float and encourage them to play. An alternative would be to drop the same floating goodies or toys into a large container.

**Moving Items** – Mix up your dog's environment every so often, just to keep them on their toes - a change is as good as a holiday! Move items around in the yard, leave things in different places, re-arrange the furniture in your house, change your dog's bedding, move their crate or bed to a different area. Buy some potted plants and shift them around the place. Change your dog's toys on a regular basis, to help maintain interest.

**Daily exercise** – long walks, games, hiking, dog parks, training etc. Yes getting out and about with your dog is essential and should form a big part of any enrichment program and indeed part of every dog's daily life.

For destructive dogs, a 30 – 45 minute walk before you go to work is great as it releases a lot of the energy that your dog may normally use to be destructive once you leave. If your dog is having troubles being left alone, it is a good idea to discuss their behaviour with your Professional Pet Guild trainer. No amount of exercise will overcome separation anxiety, if that is the assessed reason behind the destructive behaviour. If you can't squeeze a walk into an already busy morning then you must make time to walk after work. Most dogs do well with a minimum 30 – 60 minute walk every day. Vary where you walk to keep it interesting and vary your dog's exercise. You can also get involved in activities like flyball, agility or lure coursing + other activities that your breed is designed for.

The important thing is to make sure you do not give the same things every day and not always as an indication to your dog you are going out. Mix them up, rotate them and be inventive. Try to make things hard for your dog as they get better at finding things around the yard or accessing the treats etc. All animals habituate to things, which mean that the more your dog gets something, the less likely they are to react to it. Keep them constantly guessing at what you have given them today.

The benefits of providing enrichment to your dog from day 1, is that they learn that these items are OK to chew, rip up etc. Your dog has an outlet for chewing, mouthing and playing. Plus by giving the enrichment items to your dog when you go to work or go out, it helps the dog to focus on something other than the fact that you have gone. And because these things are fun, your dog will actually enjoy you leaving just so they get something special.

A professional pet dog trainer who can assist you with further education for your pup can be found at the Pet Professional Guild Australia (PPGA), [www.ppgaaustralia.net.au](http://www.ppgaaustralia.net.au). Click on your State on the map and search for a professional trainer near you. It's that simple!

There is also FREE Membership to PPGA for pet dog owners, providing access to valuable current best practice training resources and webinars.

