

One of the biggest problems modern dogs face is boredom.

They no longer need to hunt for their food and rely on humans for all their needs, including mental stimulation. Since you can't interact with your dog during all his waking hours, you'll need to provide other ways for your dog to occupy his mind and burn up some energy. When your dog is home without you, his environment should be comfortable and stimulating, whether he's inside or outside.



The basics of your dog's environment:

- Plentiful supply of clean water.
If outside, it should be in the shade. For big dogs, a galvanised bucket works well.
- At least one comfortable place to sleep.
2 dog beds are better than one so he can have some choice and variety: each bed can offer a different view of the yard, different levels of shade, different styles (trampoline and a soft sided one), and at least one should be close to the house with a view inside. If the dog is not reactive then provide a view of the world either through the fence or put a bed in an elevated position so he can see over the fence.
- Shelter from the weather.
Good quality kennel, should be under cover of a veranda and near to the house. The door should be facing away from the sun and prevailing winds.
- Toys, chews and other things to do when not sleeping.
- Safety - Padlocks on all gates are highly recommended to deter dog thieves and to prevent neighbourhood kids from opening the gate letting the dog out. Both are problems in Newcastle and the Hunter and all over Australia.



What does your dog enjoy doing? Does he like water? Provide a child's pool. Like to dig? provide a clamshell pool full of sand or a designated place in the garden where he's allowed to dig. Fill it with soft soil or sand and bury some toys there to encourage him to dig. Like to chew? Provide lots of safe toys and other items that he can chew. Like to watch the world go by? Provide a view to the outside such as a raised platform where he can lie and see over the fence. Or cut a hole in the fence big enough for him to look through and cover it with perspex or a metal grid.

Don't forget to get your dog out of the yard as much as you can. A good walk or run in the morning will help him be settled while you are at work. Let him stop and sniff as much as he wants on walks. Jump in the car and go new places. Contact your council or look on their website to find the locations of off lead areas.

Backyard Fun for Your Dog!

The principles outlined in this handout are intended as a general guide only. If your dog has shown aggressive behaviour toward you, your family or other people, you should speak with me.

Always supervise your dog the first few times that you give him any new item to play with to make sure that he plays safely. You should take great care to ensure that there is no danger to your dog or others in any of these activities.

Environmental Enrichment is for those times when your dog is left home alone. As dogs are social animals it is vitally important that you spend quality time with your dog each day. These ideas should be used in addition to your normal family interaction and a physical exercise routine appropriate for your dog.

Toys, Toys and More Toys

There are many great toys on the market that are designed to keep your dog occupied: individual dogs will have different preferences. Food and treat dispensing toys are particularly great.

Your dog will very quickly get bored if all his toys are always available to him all the time. So put out a few at a time, one of each type, take away the rest then ROTATE them back in every few of days.

Here are three Australian websites selling a wide range of stimulating toys, much more variety than you'll find in your local pet supplies store:

<http://www.politepaws.com.au/store/>

<http://www.petsneedalifetoo.com>

<http://www.aussiedog.com.au>

Road Trip

Take your dog for a ride in the car when making those short trips such as dropping the kids off at school or going to the post office. It offers him a change of scenery. Even better if you stop at the park on the way home and give your dog a quick run. Please don't leave your dog alone in a vehicle as he is vulnerable to theft, harassment, and most of all death from overheating.

A Child's Wading Pool

A child's pool is very versatile! You can purchase shallow moulded plastic children's pools (such as clamshells) quite cheaply. You can fill it with water, sand, shredded paper or lots of balls. You can even put some blankets in an empty pool to make a nice bed for a large dog!

When filling with water ensure that your dog can easily get out of the pool and that it is just paddling depth. A pool in the shade on a hot day could save your dog's life! Encourage your dog to try it by dropping some toys or treats, even vegetables such as carrot pieces or whole apples which will float.

If you don't have a pool you could be to drop the same floating goodies or toys in your dog's water bucket. For small dogs a shallow plastic storage container such as an under bed storage container is sufficient size.

Designating Digging Spot

Dogs love to dig. You can let him enjoy this natural behaviour, and avoid messing up your lawn, by giving him a designated place to dig. You can set aside an area of your garden and dig it up, and mix the soil with sand to make a soft digging place. You can also get a child's plastic swimming pool such as a clamshell pool and fill it with sand or soft soil. Teach your dog to dig there by letting him watch you hide his favourite toys just poking above the surface.

Randomly hide toys and hard chews in there when he's not looking to encourage him to explore just in case. Lay a trail of treats leading up to the digging pit and to the buried treasure.



Window or Viewing Platform

There are some dogs in this world, as with some people, who just love to know what's going on. If your dog is one of these help him out by placing peepholes in the fence (cover with wire or Perspex to make sure he can't get his head or mouth through) or providing a raised viewing platform (far away from fences) made out of a pile of hay bales or mound of dirt. However, if he is highly excited by movement and it causes him to bark then this may not be appropriate for him.

Hay Bales

Place some straw or hay bales in your yard to give your dog(s) something to jump on and over and in between. Change the location and shape of the bales regularly to keep your dog interested. Dogs often enjoy sitting or lying in an elevated position. Hide toys or treat amongst the bales. Just be careful you don't stack the bales in any way that they could topple over onto a dog. Don't put them near a fence as this may enable your dog to jump onto a bale and over the fence. If your dog scatters the straw or hay it makes great mulch to put in your garden.

Kids Playground Equipment

Make a boring backyard more interesting by adding some children's outdoor play equipment or cubby house to give your dog places to climb, hide, rest and explore. Buy second hand online or at garage sales. Look for them on council pick up days.



Recycle Plastic Bottles

Be sure to remove the bottle top, the plastic ring and the label from the bottle as these are a choking hazard. Punch or burn some holes in the sides of the bottle, large enough for pieces of dry food to fall through. Make sure there are no sharp edges. Fill the empty bottle with dry food for hours of fun. Supervise your dog with this toy.

Food Dispensing Toys: Kong & Treat Ball

Give your dog a food dispensing toy before you leave for work to help turn a negative event into a positive one for your dog. Pet shops have a wide variety of food dispensing toys and puzzles to entertain your dog and slow down fast eaters. You can put wet food in a Kong Classic and put dry food in a Treat Ball. When your dog rolls a treat ball it slowly releases its cargo of yummy food. You can smear peanut butter or cheese near the opening to encourage your dog to start using it.

Kong Classic



When introducing any toy or puzzle, make it very easy to get the food out initially then start to increase the difficulty. Once your dog has mastered a round treat ball you can increase the challenge by providing a Kong Wobbler or a Buster Cube.



Treat Ball



A Foobler (left) is a unique treat ball that has 6 compartments that you load with kibble and treats. You use a phone app to set the timer to release one compartment at a time at various intervals throughout the day. Lasts all day! Great for dogs home alone.
www.foobler.com.au

Swinging Tyre

Hanging an old tyre from a tree can be a great way to entertain a boisterous dog. Place toys or treats in the tyre to ensure your dog is interested and gets some reward for the game. Make sure that the anchor point can take your dog's weight as well and that your dog cannot get caught up in it and become injured. Check out www.aussiedog.com.au for their 'Home Alone', a robust, interactive, hanging dog toy.

Reuse Your Packaging

Empty milk cartons, the cardboard centre from toilet rolls and paper towels, egg cartons, cereal boxes and even pizza boxes can be used to entertain your dog. Place some treats in them and let him find the treats and have fun destroying the boxes. The bonus is that you are provided with exercise picking up the pieces afterwards! Be careful though if your dog likes to ingest foreign materials.

Ice Blocks

Place some suitable scraps of food (raw carrot, cooked rice, pigs ear, raw bones, chicken necks, liver treats etc) into an ice cream container or Kong toy, fill with water (or chicken or beef stock) and freeze. You could even freeze a knotted rope into it so it could be hung somewhere or maybe bury it – as the ice melts the interest is renewed as treats come to the surface. A cool idea for the hot weather!



Ice Timer

This is a neat trick for delivering a treat to your dog hours after you leave the house. Start with a 250ml plastic cup such as a margarine tub and a length of twine about 20cm long. Fill the cup with water and place the ends of the twine in the water so that a loop of string hangs out. Now freeze the whole lot. When frozen, the ice acts like a frozen knot joining the string together. When the ice melts, the knot 'releases'. A 250ml cup may last about two hours and a two litre ice cream container several hours depending on the weather.

In the morning, remove the ice timer from its plastic cup and hook the string up high over a nail, on your washing line or wherever else you can secure it. Now place whatever you would like to give to your pooch later in the day (a stuffed frozen Kong, pig's ear, favourite toy, Dentastix, a cup of your dog's dry food, etc), in the hole created by the loop of string and the ice. When the ice melts, the object will be delivered to your pooch! Great for dogs that are home alone while family are at work.

Leaking Plastic Bottle Timer

The leaking bottle acts like a timer to release the reward minutes or hours after you set it. Set it up before you go to work so your dog gets something new to chew or eat later in the morning.

You will need a 1, 2, or 3litre plastic milk carton or soft drink bottle, a length of light wood such as a ruler and a reward such as a stuffed frozen Kong, a pig's ear, or a margarine tub containing treats or food.

Put a slit or hole in the bottom of the bottle. Fill it with water. You can even freeze it to make it drip longer. The water will slowly leak out over time, the length of which is determined by the amount of water you use.

Enriching Your Dog's Life and Environment

Place the length of wood high up on a ledge. Place the leaky bottle on one end of the wood and balance it with the reward on the other end. When enough water has leaked out, the ruler and food will clang to the ground and give a sudden food treat to your dog.

Hanging Tug Toy Food Dispenser (Milk Bottle Bungee)

This toy consists of a bottle full of kibble or dry treats which you hang from a tree or post and your dog has to tug on a cord to shake the bottle to make the food drop out. It's especially suitable for dogs that like to play tug. Supervise your dog when you first introduce this toy. Materials needed:

- A bungee cord - available from hardware stores. Look for a cord with a carabiner on each end.
- An empty 2L milk bottle or similar bottle with a handle – All labels, lid and ring around the lid removed. Washed and allowed to dry completely.
- A long strip of soft material such as fleece, denim, canvas or a soft rope.

Using scissors or craft knife to cut a few small holes around the base of the milk bottle – the holes need to be just bigger than the dry food or treats you'll put in the bottle.

Tie the strip of fabric to the handle. Make sure there are no loops in the rope. This will hang down for your dog to tug.

Attach one end of the bungee cord to the handle of the milk bottle. Attach the other to a tree or post. The milk bottle needs to be out of reach of your dog so that he has to use the soft rope to pull on the bottle.

Don't use the washing line, as you don't want to teach your dog to pull on items hanging from the line. The bottle bungee should be just high enough that your dog can reach the rope to tug on without having to jump too high (to avoid awkward landings and injuries).

Add some dry food or dry treats through the top of the bottle.

You can teach your dog how to use the toy by encouraging him to tug on the rope and dropping treats on the ground when he pulls on it. Make it very easy at first by making the holes large, plentiful, and very low in the bottle. As your dog gets better at releasing the food, replace the bottle with a new bottle with fewer holes, smaller holes, and some higher up in the bottle.

Credit: this idea is from <http://www.allpetseducationandtraining.com.au/milk-bottle-bungee.html>

If you're not a DIY kind of person, you can buy a 'Home Alone' toy from www.aussiedog.com.au. This is a very robust version of the milk bottle bungee toy.

Treasure Hunt

Before you go out to work in the morning or out for dinner at night, instead of giving your dog his regular dinner in a bowl take a cup of dry food and go out into your backyard and throw it all over the grass. That should keep him busy for a little while. Also try hiding his stuffed Kongs and food dispensing toys so that when you go to work he is busy hunting for his food.

Recycled Marrow Bone

Next time you get marrowbones from your local butcher ask him to cut the ends off. When your dog is tired of chewing on that old marrowbone, don't throw it out because you can recycle it! Take the hollow middle section and smear peanut paste, cream cheese or sausage mince onto the small end then fill it up with either dry or canned food or a mix of both and cover over the other end with peanut paste or cream cheese. Your dog will LOVE you for recycling his bones.

Dog Walker, Dog Day Care or Visitor

Arrange for a friend or neighbour to come and take your dog for a walk or just spend some time with him in the middle of the day.

Send your pooch to doggy day care, even if only for one day a week. I recommend Hunter Dog Centre in Gateshead www.hunterdogcentre.com.au

Hire a dog walker for one-on-one, or small group, on-lead walks. Be sure to thoroughly check references, insurance and get details of how many dogs are walked at a time, how they are transported, and where they are taken. Ask me for recommendations.

Dog Friends

Maybe your dog has some friends he could visit once a week, or who could come to visit him. Spending a day with a compatible friend is a great way to enrich your dog's life and provide some valuable socialization.

If your dog is lonely home alone getting another dog may or may not solve the problem. Your dog may be wanting human company, not another dog. A good way to find out is to become a dog foster carer. This has many advantages. If it doesn't work out you do not have the long term commitment of owning another dog. If it does work out then your dog has new dog friends to play with all the time. But if the dogs don't get along the foster dog can be moved. If they get on like a house on fire you can adopt your foster dog. Contact Dog Rescue Newcastle about fostering or adopting.

Doggy Door

Dogs that have access to inside the house often spend much of their day inside feeling safe and secure and SNOOZING!

Snuffle Mat and Snuffle Balls

A Snuffle Mat is a deep shag rug. You scatter treats or kibble in the mat and your dog (or cat, rabbit, or guinea pig) has fun using his nose to find the food. It slows down fast eaters, has a calming effect and gives your dog something interesting to do. Use it on rainy days when your dog is restless from not getting a walk. Great for all dogs, especially timid or nervous dogs.



I make Snuffle Mats and Snuffle Balls out of brand new, thick, high-quality fleece and rubber mats. Snuffle Mats for dogs are 60cm x 4cm and \$50. Snuffle Mats for cats are 40x30cm and \$30. Snuffle Balls are \$20. Includes delivery to Newcastle or northern Lake Macquarie, NSW. Details on my website: <http://dogtrainingnewcastle.com.au/products.html#snuffle>

High Tech Tools

I advise against the use of any sort of electronic collar such as those that emit citronella, sound, or electric stimulation. There are some electronic tools that can help your dog throughout the day while you're not home.

- **Foobler** w Bluetooth \$69 <https://foobler.com.au/> dispenses food or treats at timed intervals.
- **Pet Tutor** \$149 <https://smartanimaltraining.com/>
- **Furbo Dog Camera** (has barking alert) <https://shopau.furbo.com/>

Non-Food Ideas and Ideas for Timid Dogs

If you want inspiration for enrichment that doesn't involve food, or enrichment for more sensitive dogs that are reluctant to interact with toys, read this wonderful article <https://tinyurl.com/sensedog> which includes suggestions for planting and creating elements in your garden to engage your dog's senses of smell, touch and sight:

- a. plants for canine self-selection to medicate
- b. herbs and flowers with interesting scents (lavender, mint, marigold, rosemary)
- c. textured plants like tall grasses
- d. textured surfaces for underfoot sensory experience
- e. areas to shelter or explore
- f. obstacles to climb and go through

More Ideas for Environmental Enrichment

The list is endless and only limited by your imagination. See what else you can add to the list. Remember the motto— do no harm, so make sure that any ideas will not be harmful to your dog. Some of these ideas may not suit your situation and may cause more problems – be sensible when choosing the best options for your dog.

2. Training sessions – review basic skills, teach fun tricks, practice agility or obedience.
3. Fun classes –
 - a. Sniffer Dog Training offered by www.dogaholics.com.au
 - b. Dog Play Group offered by www.dogaholics.com.au
 - c. Social Agility offered by www.dogaholics.com.au
4. Dog sports - contact your local dog club, such as Newcastle All Breeds Training Club on Hillsborough Rd <http://newdog.org/> or Telarah Dog Training www.telarahdogtraininginc.com to find out what they offer.
5. Doggy Day Care - Hunter Dog Centre in Gateshead <http://www.hunterdogcentre.com.au>
6. Old balls eg: footballs, soccer balls from sports teams and clubs.
7. Rope toys
8. Frisbee
9. Tunnel
10. Hanging toys
11. Long lasting chews: Cow, pig, and sheep ears and cow, kangaroo, veal and chicken tendons. These natural products are healthier than raw hide.
12. TV or talk radio on timer
13. Treats in ice cubes floated in large water container
14. Flower and herb garden to stimulate your dogs sense of smell
15. Collection of 'smelly items' from outside environment
16. Barrels
17. Muffin Tin - make a puzzle toy by putting treats in each muffin space then put a tennis ball on top of each treat and let your dog work out how to remove the balls to get to the treats. You can also serve meals in the muffin tin (without the balls) to slow down fast eaters.
18. Scent trails - bury treats around back yard, under pots, wrapped up in old rags etc.
19. Put a bunch of cardboard boxes and tubes on the ground, put a treat in a couple of the boxes. Let your dog sniff out which boxes contain the treats.
20. Parcel – wrapped in multiple layers of newspaper with a dog treat as the prize in each layer.
21. Pizza delivery – let your dog tear up the nice smelly box, so long as he doesn't eat it.
22. Piñata – put holes in a milk carton, add treats, then hang it up (supervise your dog).
23. Move furniture around sometimes to create new interest.

24. Play hide n seek with your dog in a safe area. (The dog has to find you.)
25. Toilet roll tubes - put a treat in an empty cardboard toilet roll tube (after all the paper is removed of course), fold over the ends, and let your dog get the treat out. Paper towel tubes and the long tubes from wrapping paper also work.
26. Toilet roll tubes in a shoebox - pack toilet roll tubes upright in a shoebox, sprinkle some treats into the tubes. Let your dog figure out how to get to the treats.



More Ideas

- Facebook group: Canine Enrichment <https://www.facebook.com/groups/canineenrichment/>
- Facebook group: Beyond The Bowl - Canine Enrichment <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1747279312231501/>
- Facebook group: Canine Enrichment Joy <https://www.facebook.com/canineenrichmentjoy/>
- Book: Brain Teasers for Dogs by Christina Sonderrmann.
- Book: Canine Enrichment by Shay Kelly.
- Book: Play with Your Dog by Pat Miller.
- Create a sensory garden for your dog (does not involve food!) <https://tinyurl.com/sensedog>
- All Pets Education and Training's Boredom Busters page <http://www.allpetseducationandtraining.com.au/boredom-busters.html>
- The Backpack Walk <https://dogidogblog.wordpress.com/2016/06/20/the-rucksack-walk/> and <https://youtu.be/B0Dqbk1xbtw>
- Search Youtube for "DIY Dog Toys" or "Homemade Dog Toys".
- Recipes for stuffing a Kong toy: <http://www.caninemind.co.uk/kong.html>
- Dogs need a one hour walk everyday, or do they? By Shay Kelly <https://shaysdogblog.com/2017/12/03/dogs-need-a-one-hour-walk-everyday-or-do-they/>
- How to Enrich your dog's life <https://www.thevetshed.com.au/blog/how-to-enrich-your-dogs-life/4262>
- Credit for the Ice Timer and the Leaking Bottle Timer: <https://tinyurl.com/ybfomkor/>
- Credit for some ideas goes to Trudi Waller of Clever Paw's Dog Training Services.