

## **Winter Games!**

### **Inside activities to enjoy with your dog**

**By Laura Tyler**

This is the second installment of “My Favorite Play List” article which came out earlier this month. Here are a few more reasons to create indoor activities to keep your dog from driving you crazy with increased barking, chewing, pawing you and other annoying habits.

But first a bit of the human side: Focused attention to any assignment is both rewarding and taxing. A final exam or complex project can leave us with a deep sense of fulfillment and satisfaction. It’s almost startling how sleepy one can feel after that kind of dedication to task! It literally can drain the energy right out of you. Playing more complex enrichment games with your dog can also leave you both experiencing the need to share that spot of sunshine on the floor by the window for an afternoon nap.

If symptoms of misbehavior are occurring with your dog, then it’s doubly important to intervene with enrichment activities. Here’s an interesting quote I read recently from a Veterinary Behaviorist with whom I have worked on a couple of cases: “In the wild, most non-domestic animals spend the majority of their time foraging for food. In addition, they must seek out or construct resting areas and avoid predators and other natural hazards. Pet dogs on average spend less than 15 minutes a day eating because they do not have to forage for food. They are kept in static and often monotonous environments. The majority of dog breeds were developed for some functional purpose (guarding, herding, hunting, etc.) yet few dogs actually participate in these activities, leaving them with no outlet for often high levels of energy and stamina.” This quote comes from Dr. Lore Haug DVM, Certified by the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists.

Many common annoying behaviors can be put on extinction by spending quality time learning what makes your dog tick and creating an environment to fulfill those specific breed needs. The local pet food stores carry a wide variety of food dispensing toys. Putting part of each meal in one or more of these toys can simulate foraging for food. These types of toys can really help your counter surfing dog realize good things can be found on ground level. Stuffing a hollow femur bone with soft food and freezing it can give your dog plenty to do while spending time in his kennel crate.

One of my favorite games to play with Skippy is the box game. I take three to five empty boxes of varying sizes and label one the food box. I put treats in the “food” box and place the other boxes around the “prize box” and turn my dog loose to “find it”. Once she finds the food box I praise her for being a great sniffer dog and add a few more treats to the box. Then I send her out of the room and create a new puzzle by mixing up the boxes again and hiding the “prize box” in a new place nearby. I then turn her loose again to “find it” and repeat this over and over until she’s eaten most of her meal. She loves the box game. She only eats part of every meal out of a food bowl. The rest goes in a variety of interactive toys throughout the day.

We have dogs because we love them. But we must also see to their mental enrichment as well as their physical needs. It’s not complicated and the time is well spent bonding with your companion dog.

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