



Providing enrichment for dogs is an excellent way to promote mental and physical health and engage your pet's natural behaviours in an appropriate manner. Here are some fun enrichment ideas for your dog!

## Enrichment

Enrichments are activities that allow animals to engage in a natural behaviour that helps support their physical and mental health. It is important that we offer our dog appropriate outlets to express their natural behaviours daily.

When dogs are denied the ability to exercise, explore, sniff or chew, it can create frustration, anxiety, and stress for our pets. This can lead to behavioural issues such as destructive chewing, digging, barking, and other problems. Providing daily enrichment can keep your dog satisfied, happy, and out of trouble!

## What Makes for Good Enrichment?

Enrichment can range from toys, activities (like reward-based training), socialization, or even having a window for your dog to look out during the day. When thinking about enrichment, consider the following:

- **Enrichment should engage or stimulate a natural behaviour.**
  - For example, enrichment that encourages sniffing, chewing, playing, socializing, or exploring will be highly motivating for your dog. The olfactory system (smelling) part of the brain in dogs is highly developed, so any item or activity that stimulates sniffing will be very stimulating and rewarding.
- **Rotating toys or offering new enrichment items or activities keeps your dog interested.**
  - Offer different types of enrichment for your dog and rotate often. For example, providing pet-safe toys with different textures, sizes, scents, flavors will keep your dog interested in the enrichment - and not your furniture! Dogs can lose interest in toys over time, so give them new toys occasionally or rotate the toys out on a regular basis.
- **Every dog is an individual and has their own preferences.**
  - Some dogs just love playing fetch with a ball. Other dogs are not so interested in fetch but might be highly satisfied with a chew toy filled with treats or frozen nut butter. By offering different items or activities, you will learn over time what your dog prefers.

To keep your dog mentally and physically healthy, it is essential that enrichments are provided daily. The level of exercise and stimulation will also depend on your dog's age, health condition, mobility, breed, and other factors. For example, a young dog may greatly benefit from playing fetch or going for a run, while a senior dog with mobility issues would be better served by going for a leisurely walk.

## Enrichment Toys

Here are a few ideas for toys that can help keep your dog mentally stimulated during the day:

### **Snuffle Mats or LickiMats®**

Snuffle mats consist of a rubber mat with holes that have intertwined fabric strips. You can hide treats or kibble in the holes of the mat. This provides your dog the opportunity to sniff and search for the hidden treats, which often takes some time.

LickiMats® are a textured rubber mat that you can spread wet dog food, nut butter, yogurt, or other pet-safe spreadables onto. Freezing the LickiMat® after spreading something tasty on it will prolong the time it takes your pet to lick everything off.

### **Food Puzzles and Dispensing Toys**

Food puzzles or food dispensing toys engage your dog in sniffing and learning. These toys require the dog to manipulate them in a certain way to get access to treats or kibble. Successful problem is very satisfying for dogs! There are also different levels of puzzle difficulty – start your dog off with easy level puzzles and work your way up to more difficult puzzles to prevent your dog from becoming frustrated.

### **KONG or Toppl Toys**

These rubber toys are best used by filling them with treats, wet dog food, nut butter, plain yogurt, chicken broth, or dog-safe mashed fruits and vegetables and then freezing the toy. Consult with your veterinarian about the food you can offer your dog, as they may have certain dietary requirements, allergies or sensitivities.

### **Did You Know?**

Our Humane Education department has some great videos on easy enrichments you can make at home. While the videos are focused on kids, the information and guides are great for any age. You can check them out on our [Humane Education at Home Page](#) on our website.

The products mentioned above are also available for purchase at Bingo's Pet Shop at the Edmonton Humane Society. All sales proceeds go directly back to the Edmonton Humane Society to help the animals in our care.

## Sniffing Walks and Scent Games

### **Sniffing Walks**

A dog's world is highly scent-based as a significant portion of a dog's brain is dedicated to odor detection (olfaction). It is incredibly stimulating and rewarding for dogs to spend time sniffing and exploring their environment.

When you are on a walk and your dog stops to sniff, let them smell for as long as they would like, and then move along when they are ready. Go at their pace. It can be a bit tedious at first, but it is a great

mental benefit for your dog and may lead to improvements in undesirable behaviours such as less barking or anxiety-related behaviours.

### Scent Games

This is an easy way to engage your dog's natural sniffing abilities in a fun way! Grab a towel or blanket and wrap some treats or kibble inside, then encourage your dog to find the hidden goodies.

You can also create a treasure hunt by placing a few towels or blankets with hidden treats or kibble around the house in areas that are accessible to your dog. Then, encourage your dog to find each location. Start easy, by placing the items in obvious locations, then increase the difficulty.

This can also be done with their favourite treats or toys. Adding different scents to the towels or blankets such as a bit of dried ginger, cinnamon, or other non-toxic scents are also beneficial. Rotate the scents you use on a regular basis to keep your dog interested.

Another very simple way to create a "scavenger hunt" is simply sprinkling a handful of treats or kibble around your backyard or another safe outdoor area.

## Reward-Based Training

Spend a few minutes each day practicing basic obedience or a new trick. Teaching your dog new behaviours is a positive experience and provides cognitive stimulation. Did you know that dogs who have been previously trained using positive reinforcement are better at learning new behaviours in the future?

You can check out our Edmonton Humane Society resources on [Clicker Training](#), [Recall](#), and [Sit Training](#) for some training ideas.

### Additional Resources:

The Training Academy at the Edmonton Humane Society also offers several training and socialization classes. For more information, visit our website: <https://www.edmontonhumanesociety.com/what-we-do/education-training/dog-training/>

### Did You Know?

You can also ask us behaviour questions by emailing:  
[askthespecialist@edmontonhumanesociety.com](mailto:askthespecialist@edmontonhumanesociety.com)

It takes approximately \$7 million to keep the Edmonton Humane Society operational for one year and 40% of these funds come from generous donations made by supporters like you. Please [Donate](#).