



### **Mental stimulation and environmental enrichment**

Environmental enrichment is an essential component for providing a good quality of life for our canine companions. It can prevent unwanted behaviour and also help tackle unwanted behaviour. Mental stimulation is essential to avoid our dogs becoming bored and finding their own amusement.

One really simple way to ensure environmental enrichment is to rotate their toys. If toys are left lying around, dogs quickly habituate to them and no longer show interest. Leave three toys down but pick up the rest of the toys and swap them over once a week. This will help retain novelty.

Sometimes a dog may not engage fully with an enrichment activity. This can be for a number of reasons. He is too stressed, the environment is causing him stress, he does not understand what is required, he does not like the food used and so on.

Enrichment can be carried out as a partnership, deepening the bond between owner and dog. To begin a new enrichment activity, sit with your dog and point out a couple of treats that are hidden. Let him eat these and see if he continues to look for more. If he does, just stay with him while he completes it. You can then reset the enrichment and make it a little more difficult.

Mental stimulation can take many forms. Mealtimes can be made interesting by using a stuffed Kong, Buster cube, biscuit maze, snuffle mat, licky mat or green feeder to encourage foraging. Some puzzle games are expensive, and it doesn't take long for dogs to work them out. A snake toy such as the one pictured below is cheap and easily packed with their food, whether you feed wet, dry or raw.





## Dog Behaviour Clinic

A dog's ability to smell and interpret the smells depends on a complicated chemical sensing system. Dogs have around 250 million scent receptors in the nose. Humans have only five million. A large proportion of a dog's brain is devoted to scent. The nose is the fastest route information can get to the brain. Dogs simply love to use their nose and not only that, doing so tires them out just as much, if not more, than physical exercise.



A muffin tray can be loaded with treats and covered with tennis balls, so that the balls need to be pushed or picked up in order to access the treats.

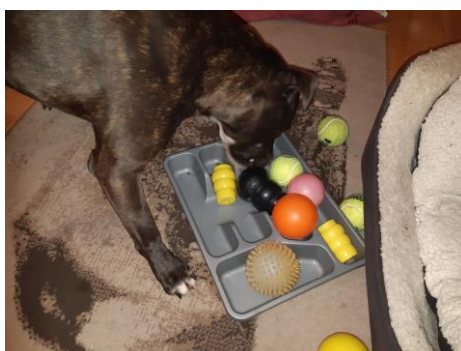


Lay out an old towel on the floor. Drop a couple of food treats and cover them with a quarter length of the towel. Drop a couple more treats and fold over again. Make it really simple to begin with while he gets to know the game. Dogs will often show very little interest if the food we are using is not interesting and if the game is too difficult. If your dog is not interested, try making the game easier to begin with.





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A drawer organiser for cutlery loaded with treats, covered by toys or empty plastic bottles etc

Treats or even toys hidden around the garden on top of flowerpots or behind them etc. Cheap items of clothing from a charity shop can really get them sniffing! Making the garden interesting and full of surprises helps reduce barking at noises or fence running.



Sprinkling small amounts of grated food (the smellier the better) will encourage calm sniffing and exploration. This helps reduce stress and anxiety and is incredibly mentally tiring too.





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Cardboard boxes are fantastic and can be filled with toys or balls, with treats sprinkled in between them.



Alternatively, use an old paddling pool, child's plastic step or laundry basket filled with safe items such as plastic balls.



Licky mats provide a long-lasting toy with minimal food, useful for dogs who may be overweight.







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Remember to ensure the floor has suitable covering to avoid slipping, especially with dogs who have joint or arthritis issues. If the toy is liable to slip around, try placing it on a soft bed to prevent frustration.

