



# Grafton Dog Obedience Club Inc.

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## ENVIRONMENTAL ENRICHMENT

### What is environmental enrichment?

Environmental enrichment means providing your dog with surroundings that are physically and mentally stimulating and which allow him to express his natural instincts in an appropriate way. Many dog behaviour problems are due to lack of physical and mental exercise. Dogs are social pack animals and require company (of humans or other animals) and an opportunity to use their abilities in a positive way. For example many terriers like to dig; herding dogs like to chase; hounds like to sniff and follow smells; gundogs like to retrieve.

Boredom from being alone for long periods of time, or from having no physical or mental stimulation leads to problems such as barking, chewing, digging and other destructive or unacceptable behaviours. Providing appropriate activities for your dog's breed, age and temperament can avoid many problems and lead to a happier and better behaved dog.

For example, a digging pit may provide an appropriate outlet for a dog that digs up your lawn or garden; chasing a ball or frisbee is a suitable substitute for those herding breeds that don't have the opportunity to actually work stock; finding treats hidden around your backyard is a stimulating activity for dogs that enjoy sniffing; playing tug-o-war may be appropriate for a dog that pulls washing off the line.

### Ideas for enriching your dog's environment

- **Toys for playing** - soft toys, squeaky toys, ropes, balls, frisbees (the variety available is almost limitless). These can either be toys that the dog plays with by himself, or toys that require you to interact with your dog. Interactive toys include balls, frisbees and tug toys.
- **Objects for chewing** - bones, rawhide chews, stuffed Kongs.
- **Activity foods** - foods which either take a long time to eat, or which require your dog to work out how to get the food. Try:
  - a stuffed Kong toy (A Kong is a hollow beehive shaped heavy rubber toy with a small opening in one end). It can be used as a toy for playing or fetching, or be stuffed with a variety of food or treats which your dog has to work at to remove (dry food can be mixed with a little peanut butter or soft cheese to help it stick together).
  - freezing a bone in the middle of an icecream container of water to make a giant frozen iceblock (to get to the bone your dog must either chew up the ice or wait for the iceblock to melt)
  - freezing meat broth or soup as a doggie iceblock
  - food dispensing toys such as a treat ball (a ball with a small hole where dry treats drop out when your dog rolls the ball around)
  - hiding treats around the backyard and let your dog go hunting for them



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- wrapping treats in layers of paper or old t-shirts and let your dog have fun unwrapping the treat
  - a complex toy designed for dogs that tear washing off the line. The toy has a treat dispensing ball threaded onto a bungee cord. The toy is suspended just out of the dog's reach. In order to get one small treat, the dog must jump up, swing on the handle, which causes the ball to bounce on the cord and one treat to fall out. The dog must repeat this whole process to get each and every treat. This is a wonderful time and energy consuming toy for very active and destructive dogs.
  - **Digging pit.** Build a sandpit especially for your dog (maybe even bury some treats in the sand for him to find).
  - **Water for playing.** Provide a shallow wading pool for your dog to splash and play in.
  - **Viewing platform.** Build a viewing platform in the middle of your backyard so that your dog can see what is happening in the neighbourhood. Your neighbours may provide him with hours of entertainment!
  - **Tunnels.** Make tunnels either above or below ground for your dog to run through and/or lie in.
  - **Play equipment.** Play fun games with your dog – have him jump through a tyre tied to a tree branch; walk along a plank raised up off the ground; jump over poles raised off the ground; weave through a row of tomato stakes hammered into the ground.
  - **Music.** Either leave the radio on for your dog, or play calming music if your dog is stressed when left alone (Vivaldi, Mozart, etc.)
  - **Companionship.** Spend time with your dog. Include him in your family's activities so that he feels part of the pack (being isolated away from his family/pack is punishment to a dog); if he is well socialised around other dogs, take him to your local off leash dog exercise park for a game with his doggy friends. In some cases, getting another dog may be an appropriate way to provide your dog with extra companionship.
  - **Exercise.** Take your dog for regular walks; take him swimming; take him to different places for the opportunity to run free and explore (if you feel it isn't safe to let him off lead, take him on a very long lead or a retractable lead).
  - **Training.** Take him to training classes to learn basic obedience and good manners. Choose a club or trainer who uses positive reward based training so that it will be fun for both you and your dog.

Remember to also provide weather protection (shade from hot sun, protection from rain, wind and cold), a comfortable place to sleep, and plenty of fresh drinking water (either a spillproof bowl or several bowls placed around the yard).

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