

How to introduce your dog to a food toy

Dogs are hunters, scavengers and opportunists. They need to be given a job otherwise they will find other things to do. This usually involves things we don't like so much such as excessive barking, escaping and destructiveness around the house.

The benefits of feeding dogs out of food and treat dispensing toys are well documented. However, not all dogs naturally know how to work food out of a treat ball, a puzzle toy or Kong.

Like any game, if it's too hard and you never win, you usually give up. Or if the game is too easy, it becomes boring.

Treat toys work the same way with dogs!

The general rule is: **Start easy, gradually make it harder**

- Introduce the toy to your dog by placing it on the floor (empty).
- Let your dog sniff it and investigate.
- Reward your dog for showing interest by giving them a few treats scattered around the toy.
- Move the toy around with your hand to show your dog what it looks like when it's moving.
- Again, scatter some treats around the toy.
- Put some food in the toy (depending on what toy it is, make sure the food can come out easily. Dry food usually works well).
- Show your dog that when the toy moves, the food can fall out
- Allow your dog to eat the treats
- By this stage your dog will be more interested in the toy and perhaps nudge it with his nose or use his paw.
- Reward this by scattering more food on the ground near the toy
- Gradually put more food in the toy than around it and encourage your dog to investigate and move the toy around.
- When your dog is really good with a toy, make it harder to release the treats (some toys have an opening that can be adjusted) so that they don't get bored. This way you get longer lasting entertainment out of the toy
- Things to do to make it harder:
 - Wrap the toy in a piece of paper
 - Hide the toy in a cardboard box
 - Use moist food in the toy
 - Freeze the filled toy
 - Suspend the frozen filled toy from a beam or branch to make a piñata



All dogs from puppies to seniors can enjoy the benefits of treat dispensing toys. Also ask us about cheaper home-made options!

Refer to our info sheets on Kongs and treat dispensing toys for recipe ideas and to choose toys that suit your dog.

