

Useful Hints & Tips

Dog Treats and how to use them effectively

Most dog training methods rely on using 'positive reinforcement' to communicate effectively with our dogs. This is a process of allowing a dog to associate what he has done with something nice happening. There is now more evidence to suggest that dogs, which are taught using such kind methods, actually perform better. The main ways of using positive reinforcement are by using praise combined with treats.

Often using treats initially is a good way of getting the dogs attention and it can be a good method to use with older dogs who need to be reminded of the training they had in their puppy days.

Which treat?

The main ways to use treats are as a reward, as a lure or temptation and as bait. The sensory properties of various treats will make them more or less suitable for each of these purposes.

Treats with a strong aroma are often especially effective as lures and baits. Those with the strongest aromas are often the semi-moist treats, which are especially tasty and attractive to dogs. Many trainers in the past have used dried liver to treat their dogs but this can be messy and is not nutritionally balanced – liver being very high in vitamin A.

Too much vitamin A can lead to bone problems and other abnormalities. Some of the flavoured biscuit treats are also available in foil wrapped bags to preserve the tasty aroma that makes them effective for training.

Wholesome nutrition: how much to feed?

Treats are called complimentary pet foods. This is because they are not intended to make up 100% of a dogs diet but can still be fed with other prepared foods without upsetting the nutritional balance.

The reason these treats are superior to homemade scraps is that they have added vitamins and minerals, which are added at a level to ensure that the vitamin-mineral level is still in the optimum range when fed with other pet foods. The complimentary pet foods have guides on the label, which tell you how much of the treats you can feed on a daily basis without upsetting this nutritional balance.

Another factor that can affect how much you feed is the need to watch calories in dogs prone to being overweight. For these dogs you can ensure that for every treat you give, you reduce the daily ration of complete food by a weight equivalent to the amount of treat fed.

Another alternative is to use a lower calorie biscuit.

Calming and socialising

Other reasons for giving treats include giving the dog something to pass the time. This can be useful for dogs suffering from 'isolation anxiety'. These dogs tend to worry when left alone and as a result may be destructive in the home. The ideal treat in this case is a chew or a hollow toy stuffed with dry food: there are a number of toys that need to be pushed around by the dog to release the food.

Puppy chews come in a range of sizes and are particularly good as they can be used to settle your new puppy so he learns good habits. A useful tip is to leave him in a safe place, preferably a pen that he is accustomed to with his own bed, some water to drink and the chew. Leaving a radio on also helps provide comfort. Make sure the first few times you leave him for only short periods of time.

Bonding

Treats can also be used to seal the bond between you and your dog. Hand feeding is a very strong stimulus for dogs to eat and rewarding good behaviour with a tasty snack is pleasurable for both you and your dog.

Some people also like to use treats in the socialisation programme. This is the time when you are getting your puppy used to new people, sounds and experiences.

Getting the postman and other regular visitors to give your puppy a treat and a kind word ensures harmonious relationships

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