



## perth's DOG whisperer

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*The respected WA dog behaviour consultant helps us understand our canine companions*

### Using special treats as rewards can fast-track your dog to follow instructions and show good behaviour

**W**HEN training your dog, it is important to have a sound grasp on how, what and when to use reinforcers. This improves and escalates training. It also builds a firm foundation of friendship with your pet.

Exchanging food for preferred behaviour is an important way to teach your dog, as are other reinforcers that he/she finds desirable.

Knowledge of what makes your dog tick is also necessary for successful training and behaviour modification.

There are several methods to follow when attempting to modify dog behaviour. Here are some of them.

#### ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS OR FIVE CENTS?

Like humans, dogs have their food preferences. Using top-quality food rewards is a quick way to ensure your dog puts in a good effort. Freshly baked lamb's liver, roast beef, chicken, polony, sausages, frankfurters, other delicious fresh meats and cheese fall into the desirable category. Although your dog may normally enjoy dry food, using special treats will fast-track the learning process.

#### WHAT DOES YOUR DOG WANT?

Your dog is the best barometer in determining what reinforcements are appropriate. Remember, it's not always food. There's a wide array of incentives to reward good behaviour and create the desired outcome.

#### Here are some examples:

- \* Adopt a positive, upbeat attitude when you pat and praise your dog.
- \* Find the dog's favourite spots to scratch.
- \* Offer toys and play with your pet. Involve yourself in the play, not only by throwing balls.
- \* Give your pet opportunities for adventure, such as sniffing out new places and interacting with new dog friends.
- \* An opportunity to run off-lead (or on a long line) is a favourite choice for many dogs.

Using food is an important tool, but it's also necessary to be more aware of what "turns your dog on" at any given time.

While food shouldn't be discounted, become more perceptive as to what motivates your dog and offer it in return for the desired behaviour.

#### GETTING MORE GOOD BEHAVIOUR

The sensible use of various inducements that matter to your dog fast-forwards the learning process. However, this is not the same as giving your dog something that you think they should want.

#### Here are a few examples:

- \* You pat your dog but it shrugs you off. It prefers the treat that you have. Therefore, the treat is the desired reward and the one the dog will work best to obtain.
- \* You give your dog food they normally enjoy, but it is much more interested in investigating a tree in the park. The tree has become the desired reward.
- \* You pat and food-reward your dog, but it wants to play with another dog. The companionship of the other dog is the most desirable reward.

Don't waste your time giving the wrong inducement.

Basically, dogs, like humans, will perform acts if they have satisfactory rewards. The key to training success is to know which rewards your pet values and to use them in encouraging the

desired outcome. Your dog will do something for you in return for getting what it wants.

If you follow this advice, before you know it, you will have increased and improved your dog's good manners.

#### FOOD DELIVERY COUNTS

It's often more effective to reward worthy efforts by offering a number of small pieces of desirable food, in close succession. Do this while saying "Good dog!" and "Well done!". The upbeat rewarding process is more enjoyable than handing over a single treat that fails to engage the dog.

Training behaviour using positive reinforcement is all about being generous – not cheap or stingy.

Use food in every new environment until the preferred behaviour has been established. Offer a variety of even better food treats with increased frequency when distractions abound.

#### VARIABLE AND UNPREDICTABLE

Keep your dog interested. Don't be too predictable or boring with your treats. Once the desired behaviour is learnt, become a bit more varied and unpredictable. Change from food to patting; play to praise or seek rewards. Keep your dog guessing about what good things could be coming next.

Be smart with reinforcements throughout the teaching phase. Have patience and continue on through the countless repetitions it takes to achieve muscle-memory of the task. This will set you on the right track to getting the best out of your dog.

#### WATCH YOUR DOG

Dogs that are able to ignore distractions and pay attention usually have interested, creative, energised handlers – people who are attentive to the dogs, to their environment, and who are aware of potential triggers.

Do not miss or ignore opportunities to strengthen good behaviour. Pay daily attention to your dog and you will be rewarded with a good, respectful relationship.

Obedience exercises are made up of a series of behaviours that aren't inherently fun to repeat over and over again. However, if you have a sound understanding of what makes your dog tick and put this knowledge into practice, you will lift your training to a higher echelon.

It is your relationship with the dog that takes over when the food rewards are no longer present. It is the previous reinforcement practise and guidance, as well as the consistent handling and management that will motivate your dog to perform at its best.

You may think that only a keen, dedicated dog owner who is totally committed could achieve more than average results by applying these tips. But even making minor efforts can reap major rewards.

Your dog is worth it!

\* Check out Kathy's website for her popular Intensive Workshop dates and other exciting seminar announcements, [www.kathysdogtraining.com.au](http://www.kathysdogtraining.com.au).

#### Q Alison Goode, of Bornholm, has 60 rose bushes that have been seriously impacted by black spot – a terrible fungal disease. What can she do?

**A** Firstly, you need to take into account the environmental factors with the roses. Roses that are shaded or receive water over their foliage at night often suffer badly with black spot throughout the year. Roses that are planted too close together and do not get enough ventilation from wind passing through the foliage will also suffer badly.

There are numerous sprays available through garden centres for these problems, but make sure you have the environmental issues sorted first. You won't have to worry until spring but make sure by September you're spraying as per directions and have resolved any of the issues I raised above.

#### Q Maureen Winstanley, of Mandurah, says her wisteria has been growing well for six years, but doesn't flower.

**A** It's highly likely the climber is getting too much nitrogen, which encourages lots of lush growth but sadly not a lot of flowering. You can trigger flowering by making sure it gets very little water from May until June. This shock to the system should trigger a stunning flower display in spring.

Trevor Cochrane

#### The Garden Guru to the rescue

For your chance to get the benefit of gardening advice from Trevor Cochrane, tell us in 100 words or less about your garden and its problems. Send an email to [housecalls@sundaytimes.news1td.com.au](mailto:housecalls@sundaytimes.news1td.com.au) or write to The Sunday Times, HOME Editor, GPO Box D174, Perth, WA 6840. Include your full name and address and a daytime phone number. Please do not send any soil samples or plant cuttings.

\* All readers whose gardening questions are published win a Hortex Ergonomic Garden Trowel, valued at \$7.95.



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