



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



Picture: iStockphoto.com/skhoward

Q&A

Q Ellen Dinsmore, of Bayswater, has a lot of flowering plants that have lovely foliage, but don't produce much flower.

A It's likely they are either shaded or lacking a little potash to help produce the flower they should naturally deliver. Applying potash this month is the best bet to trigger flowers this spring.

Q Casey Harman, of Leederville, is about to start building and there are a lot of big trees on the block that all have to be removed. There is a tree that looks like camphor laurel and it is the one and only tree that Casey was planning on keeping. Should Casey keep this tree or not?

A I think it's a great tree and my answer is, yes, definitely keep it. Camphor laurel is considered a pest tree in some areas, but in a typical suburban garden it looks amazing and is very hardy.

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.newsltd.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

* All readers whose gardening questions are published win a Hortex Teflon Coated Pruner, valued at \$13.95.



Teaching your dog to obey your commands should start at an early stage and it is necessary to exercise patience and understanding while training and realise that all dogs are different

WE all want our dogs to respond reliably to our commands. Not only for our convenience, but for the dog's own safety, as well as the safety of others. Unfortunately, our pets will often turn a deaf ear to our request and ignore us. However, there are ways to overcome this problem.

The following exercises need consistency and enthusiasm to succeed. They also require patience and understanding. All dogs are individual and should be treated as such.

LAY THE FOUNDATION

Early attention training is important. In the safety of your home and without distractions, teach your dog to look at you when you say its name.

Reward it for turning its head towards you. Follow through with a word like "Yes!" and then offer a reward. This early training is vital for times when the dog is exposed to more distracting or interesting environments.

Try to avoid the overuse of its name. This will help to keep your dog alert for more opportunities to come to you.

Your pet will anticipate generous rewards. These can be in the form of good quality treats, patting, verbal praise, playing with a favourite toy, dinner, a walk or a ride in a vehicle.

THE "COME" COMMAND

First say your dog's name to get its attention. If it's evident it is responding to you, take a breath, then say "Come!" in a confident voice. Only use this tactic when you're sure there is a high likelihood your dog will respond. Avoid the temptation to repeat the order.

WHEN YOUR DOG DOES COME

Prolong the reward. With the offer of food, pats or play, your dog learns that coming to you and staying with you is worth the effort. There's no hurry to leave. After the rewarding time, release your dog and let it resume what it was doing.

With increased repetition, you'll notice that the penny will start to drop and your dog will boomerang back to you more times than not.

DISTRACTION TRAINING

Once reliable responses are established, test how good a job you've done. Practise by calling your dog away from another family member who

is patting it, or from their food bowl, or while the dog is frolicking with a favourite toy.

COMPETITION WITH ENVIRONMENT

Initially save your recall for times when there isn't much competition from the dog's surroundings. Only call your dog when you're confident it will respond. Make sure that coming to you is more rewarding than ignoring you.

SAFETY FIRST BEFORE FREEDOM

Use an eight to 10m-long line that is attached to your dog's collar (to avoid injury, don't attach the long line to a head halter). Either hold or let your dog drag the long line while it investigates, plays and has a romp while still under your control. Long lines are lifesavers and are an important training tool that shouldn't be overlooked.

Once your dog returns to you, reward it accordingly. Then prompt it to resume what it was doing. As it becomes more obedient to instruction, hide behind a tree or sprint off. However, if you can't control the consequences, don't waste your recall word. More importantly, keep the dog attached to the long line.

WHAT TO DO IF THEY DON'T RESPOND

Go to your dog and take it gently, but confidently, by the collar. Then return with it to the spot from where you called. Ask it to "Sit" or "Drop" before you release it.

The point here is to teach your dog that coming to you isn't an end of good things. You can also use interruptive words such as "oi" or "ah ah" if it's being particularly aloof. Alternatively, step on the long line if your dog ignores you.

Have a friend hold on to your dog while you move a distance away. Wait until it cares enough to come to you. Pat another dog or do whatever you can think of to encourage your dog and help it understand that coming to you is the right choice.

ALL DOGS ARE DIFFERENT

Dogs have in-born drives that trigger certain responses. They can override the inducements you have to offer.

Knowing what excites your dog is important.

Dogs have a natural drive to hunt prey. Moving targets, such as a running cat, will initiate a prey response. If you cannot give your dog a better reason to come to you over such distractions, then you must take control.

Learn what your dog's natural instincts are and work with them. It will be an advantage to both you and your dog.

BONUS EFFORT EQUALS BONUS REWARD

Pay according to performance. If your dog comes to you, but there's room for improvement, reward according to merit.

A sloppy recall can still receive a pat or praise, but a dynamic response should be well rewarded with what the dog desires most. However, even if your dog's response isn't quick, but it still chose to come to you, despite the beckoning of other temptations, it deserves a high reward.

A training session with a few successful recalls is more productive than the overuse of misplaced words directed to a disengaged dog.

Once a dog has reliably learnt the command to come to you, it will keep on doing so. However, if there are any backslides, I would suggest returning to the basics.

Have fun teaching your dog, but bear in mind that it wasn't born knowing how to come when called.

* Check out Kathy's website for her popular Intensive Workshop dates, www.kathysdogtraining.com.au.

Picture: Houndstooth Studio, www.houndstoothstudio.com.au

