

IAN STONE
CDBC, CPDT-KA, FDM



SIMPAWTICO
DOG TRAINING



EX



WORK-TO-EAT

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PROJECTS FOR CANINE ENRICHMENT



VERSION
3.0

10 projects for you to start right away, plus endless variations and resources for more!

WORK TO EAT PROJECTS

CANINE ENRICHMENT

In the wild, dogs would spend an estimated 90% of their waking hours searching for something to eat. Likewise, hunting and foraging have about a 70% failure rate! But Mother Nature, in her wisdom, has made it so that all stages of the process—regardless of the outcome—are inherently stimulating and enjoyable (otherwise, who the heck would keep doing it?).

Thus regular bowl-feeding deprives the dog of their principal activities: searching for and acquiring food. Instead, after eating, your dog will search for entertainment for the rest of the day. Generally, your dog's recreational choices then become annoying and mischievous misbehavior.

Delivering meals as WORK-to-EAT Projects allows a dog to forage, search, dissect, and consume in a way that extends meal time and makes it highly emotionally satisfying.

ACTIVATING ANCESTRAL CIRCUITS

Several pieces play into the Work-to-Eat enrichment that are noteworthy:

- **Activating their noses.** Believe it or not, unlocking the power of their noses is not something most dogs are born with. However, we can show them how to do it and light up the olfactory bulb in their brains (which are about 40 times larger than ours).
- **Activating the "searching circuit"** in the brain is perhaps one of the most highly charged neural pathways. Searching is inherently satisfying; we can see this in people who spend a lot of time browsing antique malls and department store clearance racks.
- **Appealing to dissection** is a component of the predatory sequence; "predatory" sounds scary (and if you were a rabbit being chased by a wolf, it certainly would be). However, understand that the impulses associated with this sequence are programmed into a dog's software. The drive itself isn't the issue; the lack of structure can cause problems. If we offer them structured opportunities to satisfy their desires and form connections with us, we will build a stronger bond and create healthier, well-behaved dogs.



LOW FRUSTRATION TOLERANCE (LFT)

When dogs are too focused on getting immediate rewards and unwilling to work through challenges, it can make training harder. This is called Low Frustration Tolerance (LFT), which means that dogs try to avoid anything frustrating. Ironically, this can cause them to feel more frustrated and stressed. If your dog is new to this, you may need to start with very easy training projects.

OUR FAVORITES

There are countless methods and variations on the work-to-eat theme. You could do a different one every day and never run out of ideas. That said, what follows are some of our favorites that we keep coming back to.



We also have a video demonstrating all of these projects: <https://youtu.be/Xoud91onutY>

1. FORAGING

Foraging provides significant enrichment for dogs. It's natural for dogs to tap into their instincts as scavengers. As such, it satisfies their need to explore, hunt and search for food.

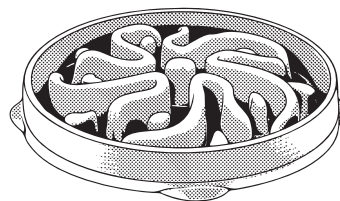
Foraging also requires the kind of mental effort their brains were made for. It promotes cognitive development, encouraging dogs to think and solve problems.

Foraging can also be a fun and rewarding activity for dogs. As they search for food or treats, they get a sense of accomplishment and pleasure from finding and consuming their rewards.

Overall, providing foraging opportunities can enhance the well-being of dogs and promote positive behavior. It's the most accessible type of work-to-eat project to implement and usually the most pleasing among all the ideas!

MAZE BOWLS

This is the most straightforward enrichment strategy to implement. These bowls with obstacles built into them make it harder to access the food. Typically these are designed to slow down a dog that inhales their food (especially for dogs susceptible to bloat). However, they're great for any dog as an enrichment activity. They're also an ideal way to introduce work-to-eat to dogs with low frustration tolerance. Maze bowls are commercially available at most pet retailers or online.



TYPICAL MAZE BOWL WITH RAISED OBSTACLES

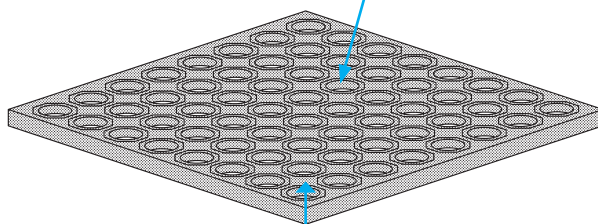
MATS

Anti-fatigue mats are available in your hardware store and usually come in 3'x3' squares. These are scored on the square foot and are thus very easy to cut with a utility knife into nine 1-square-foot pieces.

These super sturdy, all-rubber, dishwasher-safe squares make great enrichment toys for your dog. Put the mat down, scatter some kibble on it (or even use wet food), and let your dog work to get it out of all the holes and grooves.

12"x 12" RUBBER MAT

HOLES TO DROP FOOD INTO



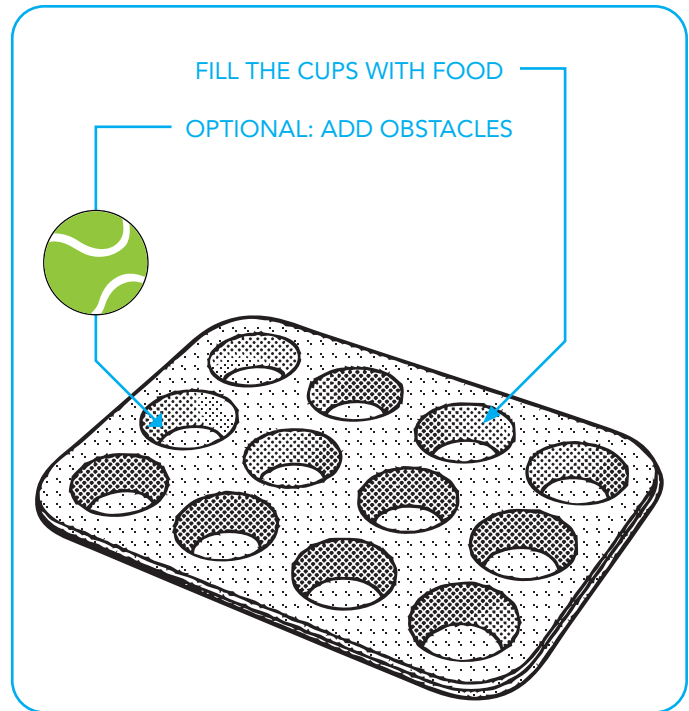
CAN GO ONTO THE TOP RACK OF THE DISHWASHER

You can purchase or make snuffle mats with felt "feelers," but we don't recommend them because they can be difficult to clean after a few uses. Alternatively, we suggest using rubber mats that can easily be cleaned by spraying them off in the sink or by putting them in the dishwasher.

MUFFIN TINS

Muffin tins also make exciting variations on the theme. Like a maze bowl, the tin is a novel way to split up the meal. There are several ways you can prepare a meal tin:

- **BASIC:** distribute the meal—wet or dry (or both)—amongst the cups
- **MIXED BAG:** mix things up by using several different things. Dry food, wet food, fresh veggies, even some of the above premade and frozen in the cup with a bit of broth (alongside the non-frozen)
- **BLOCKADE:** place tennis or lacrosse balls over the cups to block the food. Or stack a second tin over the top to block it. How do we get in?! Time to get to work and crack that safe!

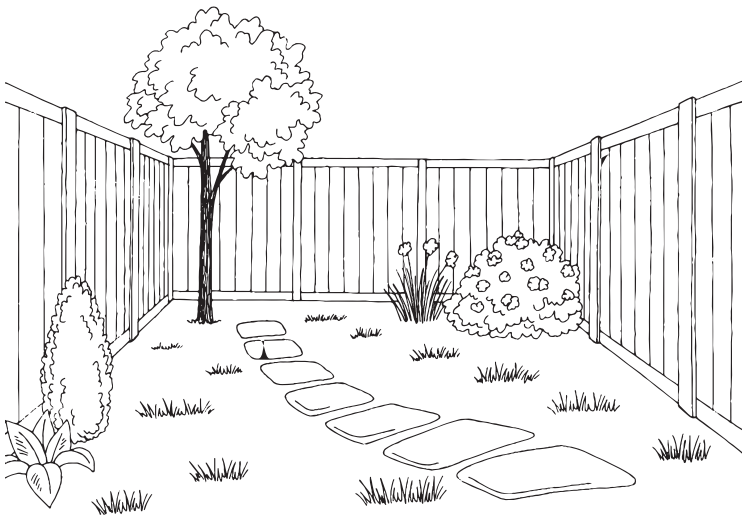
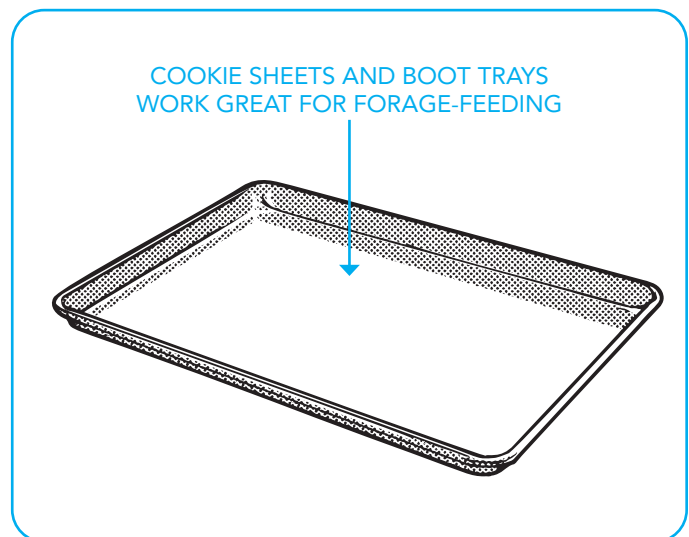


TRAYS

Boot trays and cookie sheets also make great forage-feeding instruments. It's as simple as scattering your dog's food in the tray.

SUPER FORAGE-FEEDING

Scatter feeding is a great way to get your dog to forage in a larger area (if available). Simply scatter your dog's food on the floor or in the grass, in order to make your dog search and work for the food. Remember to supervise your dog during foraging activities to ensure they don't ingest anything inappropriate or become frustrated.



SCATTER FEEDING IN THE BACKYARD OR IN THE KITCHEN IS AN EFFECTIVE WAY TO GET YOUR DOG ENGAGED IN EXTENDED FORAGING

2. DISSECTIBLES

Dissecting things is one of the end components of prey drive, and it's a hard-wired instinct that dogs find inherently gratifying. This is why dogs tend to tear apart stuffed animals, the laundry, or the mail. We can satisfy this urge by pairing it with meal times (like when their ancestors did it). If dogs are given sufficient opportunities to engage in this activity and are only allowed to do so in these contexts, they get super enrichment. They are also less likely to dissect things around the house (like pillows and purses).

AT HOME RECYCLABLES

Save your cardboard egg cartons (not styrofoam), cereal boxes, granola bar boxes, paper bags, etc.

PREP:

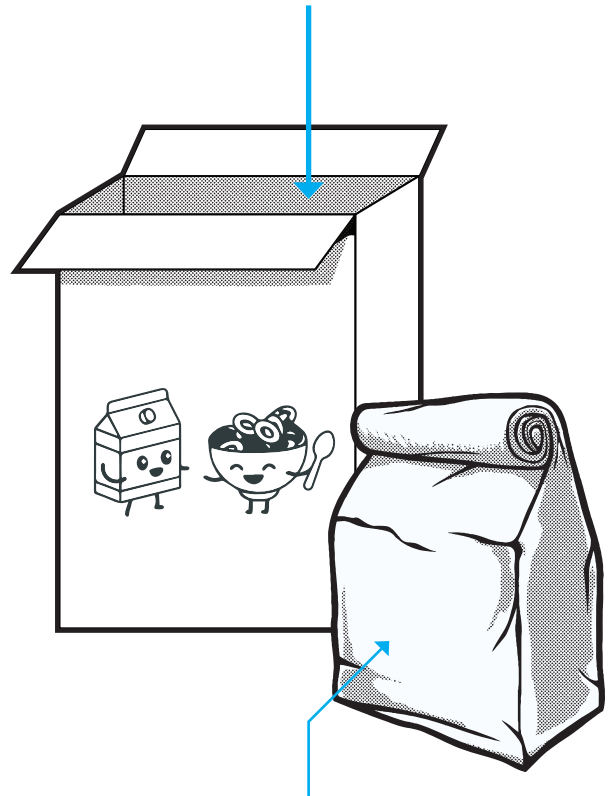
1. Fill the parcel with part of your dog's daily ration of food.
2. Add any other bits you fancy to make it enjoyable: bits of veggies or sardines, some wet food, etc.
3. Close the toy up.
4. Serve it up right away, or place it in the fridge for later that day.

It is likely that there will be a mess, and your dog may eat some cardboard. Monitor your dog's experience and adjust accordingly. But we've done these hundreds of times with dogs in the shelter and at home.

PRO TIP: If you have a dog that is new to WTE projects or gets easily frustrated, you may need to leave the tops of the containers unlatched. Sometimes, we even have to tear open a corner to show them how to do it. But don't worry; they quickly learn how fun it is to tear into the container!

PRO TIP: Simpawtico strongly recommends routine, timed feeding of dogs; this means the food should be put out at standard intervals throughout the day rather than "free-feeding," which has the food out all day. This allows you to give them the right amount of food for their size, age, and activity level and prevents them from overeating. It also helps their digestion, which is especially important for dogs with sensitive stomachs. Establishing a routine greatly improves your management and can also be helpful for house training. Timed, routine feeding can help regulate your dog's energy levels and reduce the risk of behavioral issues. A predictable feeding schedule for your dog can help promote their overall well-being and health.

FILL EMPTY BOXES WITH YOUR DOG'S MEAL



PAPER BAGS ARE GREAT DISSECTIBLES, TOO

STUBBIES & SCUDS

Stubbies and scuds are variations on dissectibles that we loved and developed further. Save your toilet paper and paper towel rolls; believe me, it won't take long to accumulate a bunch!

Stubby Prep:

1. Fold down one end of a toilet paper roll
2. Fill it 1/2 to 2/3 with kibble, or other yummy things
3. Put a knob of peanut or almond butter on it
4. Serve it right away or stick it in the freezer

You can make about a dozen stubbies in 5 minutes or so to put in the freezer and have on demand as you need them. Some dogs will open them up and extract the stuff inside. Some dogs will consume the whole thing and that's OK; they'll just poop out the cardboard they eat. Of course, monitor your dog the first few times they dig into one!

Scud Prep:

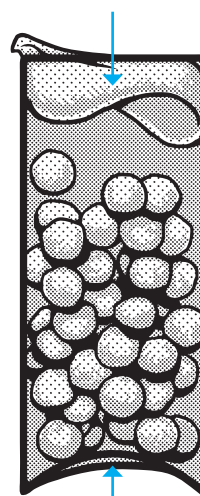
A scud is just a paper towel roll with both ends folded down; it is best for larger or mid-size dogs, and an entire meal can fit in one.

TOWEL ROLLS

Lay a towel out flat and create a bead of food in the center, lengthwise. Then, roll the whole thing up. Your dog will have to unroll it to access their food. Vary the size of your towel depending on the size of your dog; small dogs may get a tea towel, while large dogs could get a full-size towel (or several rolls stacked up).

STUBBY EXAMPLE

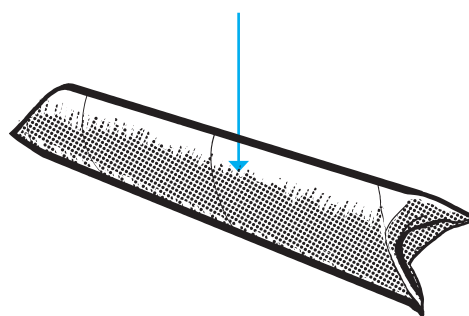
FILL WITH FOOD AND
PLUG THE OPEN END WITH A TOPPER
(HOLDS \approx 1/2 CUP)



FOLDED END

SCUD EXAMPLE

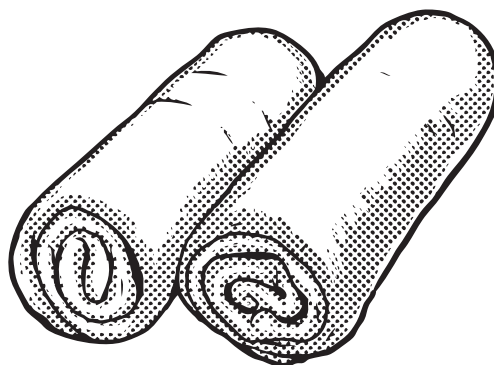
FILL WITH FOOD AND
FOLD DOWN BOTH ENDS
(HOLDS \approx 1 1/2 CUPS)



TOWEL ROLLS

A TOWEL (OR SEVERAL) WITH FOOD ROLLED UP INSIDE CAN BE AN INTERESTING PROJECT WITH LOTS OF POSSIBILITIES:

- STACKED TOWELS
- NESTED AND LAYERED TOWELS
- DIFFERENT FOODS IN EACH TOWEL FOR DISCOVERY
- DISPERSE ROLLS APART TO ACTIVATE FORAGING, TOO



STUFFED HOLLOW TOYS

Hollow toys have the greatest amount of creativity and variation available. Kongs™ are probably the most popular, but they aren't the only kind available. We also love the PetSafe Barnacle™, PetSafe Squirrel Dude™, West Paw Toppl™, OurPets Atomic Ball™, and the Ruffwear Gnawt-a-Cone™.

Regardless of which one you use, they're all prepared mostly the same.

To Use Right Away:

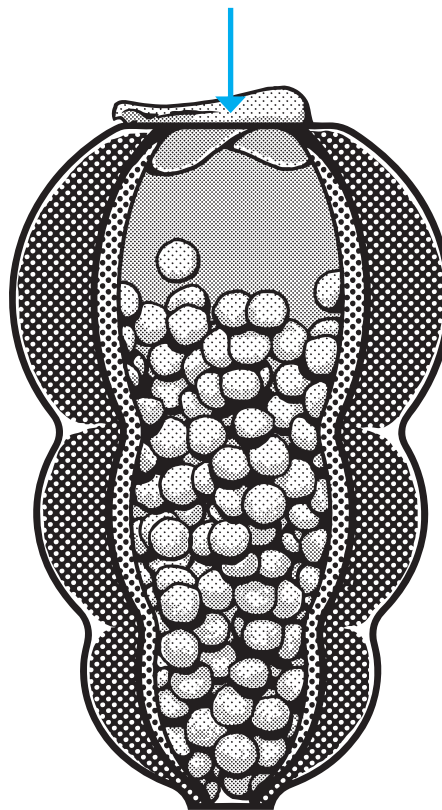
1. Fill the toy with part of your dog's daily ration of food.
2. Slap a knob of peanut butter, or plain yogurt on top. You can also substitute any nut butter—almond, cashew, or hazelnut—except macadamia. Make sure it doesn't contain Xylitol, which is poisonous. Give the toy to your dog.

To Prepare Ahead Of Time:

1. Fill the toy with part of your dog's daily ration of food.
2. Drizzle a little water over or through it. Not a lot, just moisten the food a bit.
3. Freeze it.
4. At meal time, take it out of the freezer, slap a knob of peanut butter or plain yogurt on top. You can also substitute any nut butter except macadamia.
5. Give it to your dog.

HOLLOW TOY EXAMPLE

FILL WITH FOOD AND
PLUG THE OPEN END WITH A TOPPER



OPTIONAL:
MOISTEN AND FREEZE THE FOOD

PRO TIP: Don't leave the toys out. Once the meal is finished (or your dog abandons it), pick it up, wash it, and put it away. The only things that should be available 24/7 are chew toys.



DO FROZEN TOYS HURT MY DOGS STOMACH?

No. By the time the already-thawing toy has been pawed and licked, and the food has been chewed and swallowed it's way above freezing point. It's barely even cool by then.



FOR LOW-FRUSTRATION-TOLERANCE DOGS

Don't moisten or freeze the food. Instead, give it to them dry and loose so the food tumbles out. A larger toy with a bigger hole is better, so accessing the food is easier.



We have a video demonstrating hollow toy stuffing: <https://youtu.be/LwZl1isnvPQ>

HOLLOW TOY VARIATIONS

You can also purchase other hollow toys with more complicated configurations.

- Kong Wobbler™
- West Paw Quizl™
- OurPets Buster Cube™
- PetSafe Magic Mushroom™
- PetSafe Tug-a-Jug™

It is not recommended to moisten or freeze the food with these toys. Instead, use dry or freeze-dried food.

This list is just an introduction to our favorites. There are dozens on the market, and it is good to vary them to keep things novel.

3. MORE IF YOU'RE INTERESTED

ENRICHMENT TOYS to PURCHASE

Nina Ottasson brand toys are fine enrichment toys. There is a variety of multi-faceted and challenging enrichment toys available. However, these toys are generally expensive. If you see one that intrigues you and you think your dog would like it, go for it. But, of course, once your dog figures out the store-bought toys, the novelty is over. Otherwise, we're all about the DIY aesthetic. It's less expensive with more freedom to experiment. As always, your mileage may vary.

MORE RESOURCES

Work-to-eat is only one kind of enrichment out there. It is, however, the easiest for most owners to implement right away. However, if you're keen to learn more and try out more things (and we encourage that), then here are some things for you:

- **BOOK:** *Beyond Squeaky Toys: Innovative Ideas for Eliminating Problem Behaviors and Enriching the Lives of Dogs and Cats*, by Cinthia Alia Mitchell and Nicole Nicassio-Hiskey
- **BOOK:** *Canine Enrichment for the Real World* by Allie Bender, CDBC, and Emily Strong, CDBC
- **PINTEREST:** Look up "canine enrichment" on Pinterest, and you'll probably get more ideas than you can use in a lifetime!
- **FACEBOOK GROUP:** the Facebook group "Canine Enrichment" has over 300k members. Ideas are abundant, and people will often post videos of their dogs doing things so you can see them in action.

GOOD LUCK, & HAVE FUN!