

## Gourmand - Chowhound

Some dogs live to eat, and some eat to live.<sup>(1)</sup>

Where your dog lies on that spectrum can be funny or problematic. Regardless, whether they are a gourmand, or a chowhound, or somewhere in between, there are always great ways to use food (or other reinforcers) for training and activities that will enrich their lives.

Enrichment means adding positive activities to a dog's life that they enjoy, that helps them express their natural, species-specific behaviors, and that improves their quality of life – usually through investigation, exertion of energy, and learning.

While [dogs are not wolves](#), no animal was born to eat out of a bowl once or twice a day.

### WARNING: SCIENCE

“Contrafreeloading” is an intriguing phenomenon in which animals will work to obtain food and other resources when that exact same resource is freely available nearby.

In other words, making food more challenging to get makes it more interesting to many dogs.

### Turn meal time into enrichment with food toys and puzzles.

Food toys and puzzles will often “cure” the pickiest eater. Even if your dog isn't picky, food toys are a way to make mealtime about more than just sustenance. Rather than feeding your dog and then giving them treats, turn meal time into enrichment by offering contrafreeloading options.

There are lots of different food dispensing toys to choose from (and new ones all the time). Depending on your individual dog's persistence, size and tastes, they will enjoy some more than others.

#### Here are some of our own favorites:

- Kongs, stuffed with a mix of wet and dry food. You can also mix in additional ingredients mixed in such as frozen green beans, carrot slices, dinner leftovers and other goodies.
  - Start by making it easy to get the food out.
  - After they catch on and seem to like the game, pack the Kong tighter and freeze it for a longer lasting meal.
  - Be sure not to stuff the Kong full of fatty, sugary or processed foods. Dog food mixed with other things at times is healthy and yummy for most dogs.
- Jolly Pet Romp n Roll.
- Diamond Plate Orbee Ball.
- Kibble Nibble. This one is especially good for dogs who aren't up to working hard for their food. As your dog rolls the Kibble Nibble around, the food spills out easily.

All of this applies to the dogs among us who will eat anything that's not nailed down (and even things that are, sometimes), and the dogs with in-between cravings.

### Make meal time longer and give rewards beyond just being fed.

For dogs who will eat just about anything that's not nailed down (and even things that are, sometimes), skipping that mealtime bowl of chow can be vitally important to maintaining a healthy weight. Even if your dog is more restrained, extending the time and enjoyment around a meal gives rewards beyond just being fed.

You can help keep your dog feeling full by adding frozen or fresh fruit and vegetable pieces to his food, or trying low-calorie kibble (talk to your veterinarian). You can also prolong a hungry hound's mealtime pleasure with games.

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(1) Important Note: If you have a picky eater, please see your veterinarian to make sure there are no hidden physiological reasons for the picky eating. Pain, illness, parasites and certain other conditions can cause inappetence, so make sure your dog is OK from the start.

### Playing the **Hide it!** game

- Starting the game: You need to build up to playing “hide the food.” One of the things dogs most enjoy about the game is their humans’ involvement, so the first few times you play (or forever, if you like it), look with them. Engage your dog by saying their name. Look around, gasp or “yay” or “oooooh!” as you “find” a piece of kibble, pointing with your finger.
- Keep going! Keep finding pieces of kibble with your dog. After a few “finds,” name it: “Nellie, let’s go hunt!”
- Once you’ve done that a few times, with a food motivated dog you’ll only have to ask the beastie if they want to “Go hunt” and off they’ll go (but the game is a lot more fun for all if you’re involved).
- Level 1 Hide it! A few loosely-stuffed frozen kongs scattered around the house or yard.
- Level 2 Hide it more! Depending on your living situation and time allowed, you can extend his meal to kibble and low-calorie treats hidden and scattered throughout the house, yard or a given set of rooms.

### **Train!** Training is the #1 best use for your dog’s food

- Start your dog’s day with a small handful of food (about a quarter of their daily ration) in whatever bowl or toy you (and they) like.
- On work days, leave your dog with another food-dispensing toy. On days off, set your reminders or alarm to schedule two or three training sessions, each about five minutes long.
- If you’ve got food left over, put it in yet another toy and let your dog play to get the rest of their meal.
- **Train!** Positive reinforcement-based training builds the human-animal bond like nothing else. It helps your dog be “right” in all sorts of situations, and it helps you engage with your dog beyond going for a walk.
- Need help or new ideas? Kiko Pup has some of the best training videos on the internet: <https://www.youtube.com/user/kikopup>
- Need professional help? Go to [iaabc.org](http://iaabc.org) and find a consultant who can help you.

### **There are two more factors to consider about food and dogs that always need to be taken into account: your dog’s genetic make-up, and the humans in the dog’s life.**

- **Your dog’s genetic make-up.** We don’t know exactly how or to what degree genetics contributes to differences in food interest and eating styles (that is why Darwin’s Ark is studying this). We do know that some breeds, breed mixes and non-breeds<sup>(2)</sup> just eat less than other dogs, and that some eat more, and more readily.
- **The humans in your dog’s life.** Our own actions can have a much greater effect on our dogs than we realize. When we’re anxious about our dogs not eating enough, for instance, we might hover, “insist” that our dog eats, changing their food daily and other actions that, while meant to help, can make mealtime stressful for your dog. Stressed dogs eat less.

Showing our love through food is a very human thing to do. Often, our busy lives only allow short interactions with our dogs, and giving them treats is a natural way to connect. However, dogs who are overweight suffer greatly from joint pain and other issues, and live shorter lives. By replacing a handful of treats with a quick training session with tiny treats - or even substituting play or belly rubs for some of those “connecting treats” - can make the bond between you and your dog stronger, while supporting their physical health and happiness.

If you have any questions, please contact [support@darwinsark.org](mailto:support@darwinsark.org).

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(2) About 80% of the dogs on the planet are not any breed at all. [They’re just dogs!](#)