

Sniffing to Beat the Heat

Summer is finally here; the heat is blistering and the air is hazy! Average summer temperatures may leave us sweating and irritable but, for some of our dogs, staying cool is more than just a matter of comfort.

Puppies, elderly dogs, heavy-coated dogs, and brachycephalic (short-nosed) dogs are all at higher risk of heat injury because they are less able to regulate their body temperature for a variety of reasons. There are lots of ways to help your dog with the heat, including cooling coats, cooling mats, fans, air conditioning, limiting exercise and stress, and providing constant cold water and shade.

What happens when your bulldog simply can't go outside safely in a heat wave, despite these measures? Or your senior dog won't move from the shade of the porch because the heat is just too uncomfortable?

How about looking to mental enrichment, instead of physical exercise, for the too-hot days ahead?

Dogs find inherent joy in sniffing, as you have observed when your dog gets their nose glued to a post when you're out for a walk around the block! Not only is your dog able to collect important social information with their nose, they also find a mountain of enrichment and enjoyment though sniffing out different scents and their sources.

Let's use that to your, and your dog's, advantage in the next heat wave by playing Sniffer Games! A Scent Detection class is an excellent training endeavour, but sometimes we need quick and easy options to use in times like these. Below you'll find a few easy ways to engage your dog's nose around your home or on short, heat-safe walks.

Sniffy Walk

This is the easiest option of them all! Pick a cooler time of day and simply follow your dog, stopping at every pole, hydrant or patch of long grass. Don't pull your dog away, just let her indulge in the smells! Pick some new spots to walk for novel smells, and seek out trails with cool damp soil. Moisture holds scent well, so your dog will get a snootful of interesting smells on a trail like this!

Yard Sniffs

If you have a grassy yard, you can really make use of it! Try these two options using your dog's regular meals. (Be mindful that left over treats may attract wildlife and take steps to limit leaving any in the yard).

1. Treat Scatter! Take your dog's cup of food and chuck it across the yard! How easy is that? Actually, you may need to keep it contained to begin with so your dog finds all the food. As your

dog's persistence in sniffing increases, you can scatter more widely - and your dog will take longer to find the kibble!

2. Treat Tracking! With your dog indoors, walk a winding path around your yard, placing pea-sized treats every 4-6 inches in your footsteps. Show your dog the start of the trail and encourage her to sniff (and eat!) the whole trail. After a few reps, just show her the start and let her Hoover!

The "Sniff This!" Game

Your dog's nose is so much more powerful than yours. Not only is this related to the structures of the nose, but also how much of her brain is devoted to olfactory processing. Your dog is able to detect smells that you don't even know exist.

Because of this, many dogs find interest in objects that we humans wouldn't give a second thought to. Next time you go shopping and come home with bags of new items, call your dog over and bring out one item at a time and allow her to sniff it top to bottom. Once she's satisfied, show her the next item.

Notice if your dog is more interested in some things more than others -different types of materials, or store-bought items versus something you brought home from a friend's house. This is a super easy way to offer enrichment with almost no time or effort on your part!

In-Home Cookie Search

Baiting your baseboards, corners and cracks in the dog bed is a great way to engage your dog's scavenging desires that might come out a little stronger on days that her off leash hikes are limited. Be sure to hide cookies or kibble only in places where your dog is allowed to poke around; for example, hiding a treat on the fireplace hearth or in a bookshelf is probably not advisable! Try hiding your dog's dinner around the living room tonight, and search for the treats with her with lots of verbal encouragement. Within a couple days you can sit in the air conditioning in front of the TV while your dog entertains herself!

Toy Box Sniffing Game

Many dogs have a toy box in the house where their stuffies and chews are kept. Make use of it in a new way by scattering your dog's dinner through the box and encouraging her to sniff out the kibble!

Of course, use your good sense as to which games are best for your dog, or modifications that might be appropriate for her. For instance, if your dog resource guards, you will need to modify these games to mitigate that risk. If your dog tends to grab and eat inedible objects, you may need to ensure that you show your dog only safe items in the "Sniff This!" Game.

Luckily there are many ways to engage your dog's nose - and brain! - to make up for the hot-sticky days to come!



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