



ASK THE TRAINER

Drain Their Brain

With the hot weather here to stay for a few

months, here are some fun activities that will keep your dog happy and mentally stimulated without having to give them a ton of physical exercise outside.

Physical exercise is important, but keeping your dog safe is much more important. Heatstroke is a major risk and can be fatal. Walk your dog early in the morning and later in the evening and always provide water. There are also many fun ways to help tire your dog out during heat waves.

Here are some ideas for indoor fun at home.

Play games such as tug-of-war (make sure your dog knows the “drop it” cue), hide-and-seek (which is a fun way to reinforce a reliable recall), a treasure hunt (in which you hide treats and toys around the house), a game of chase, or fetch. Incorporate training. You can use games to reinforce behaviours you like. For example, when I play fetch with my dogs, I always ask them for a sit before I throw the ball.

There are many “mind games” on the market. Nina Ottason produces great puzzle-like toys for dogs, and these can be found in most retail pet stores. You can even make your own homemade puzzle by taking a muffin tray, placing some treats in a few cups, and topping the holes with tennis balls. Interactive toys are another great way to keep your dog mentally stimulated and busy. Kongs are wonderful and can be stuffed with peanut butter, cream cheese, pure pumpkin, or yogurt and then frozen to



make them last longer. Google Kong recipes – you’ll be surprised.

You can also stimulate their brains by setting up a safe homemade agility course. I’ve seen creative ones, such as putting a broom across two pillows to create a small jump. Try teaching your dog a new trick or behaviour or work on ones that your dog already knows and start to add in distractions, duration, and distance to help proof those behaviours.

Singing with your dog can be fun too. You can also give your dog some calming stimulation, such as by learning how to give your dog a massage. Read up on Tellington Touch massage. You could even arrange for a play date with one of your dog’s friends in the comfort of your home.

My friend who is a veterinarian takes marrowbones and wraps them in newspaper or paper towel and lets her dog go to town. Yes, it can be messy, but she doesn’t mind as long as her dog is having fun.

Here are some suggestions that involve going out but not outside for a walk.

Visit family and friends with your dog, or go to a store that allows dogs, such as a pet store. Try taking a fun trip to

the vet’s office to get a cookie and then leave. That will help your dog make a positive association with the clinic. You could even just go for a nice air-conditioned drive.

Take a class like a tricks class, agility, freestyle, lure coursing, nose work, or an obedience course. And remember that you can also engage your dog’s mind while you are out on your walks. It’s not always about the distance covered. You can play find-it outside. This game involves bringing a handful of kibble pieces or treats, tossing them on the ground while saying, “find it” to your dog, and then letting them search for the treasure. Practise a sit or eye contact every five houses you pass. Allow them to take their time to smell what they want.

And then there is swimming! Dogs don’t know about water safety, so make sure you do. Never let your dog swim alone and always pay close attention.

Get creative and have fun. Engaging their mind will tire them out. And as the old adage goes: A tired dog is a good dog.

Enjoy your summer!

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