

One of the biggest problems modern dogs face is boredom.

They no longer have to hunt for their food and rely on humans for all their needs, including mental stimulation. Since you can't interact with your dog 24 hours every day, you'll need to provide other ways for your dog to occupy his mind and burn up some energy. When your dog is home without you, his environment should be comfortable and stimulating, whether he's inside or outside.



The basics of your dog's environment:

- Plentiful supply of clean water.
If outside, it should be in the shade. For big dogs a galvanised bucket works well.
- At least one comfortable place to sleep.
2 dog beds are better than one so he can have some choice and variety: each bed can offer a different view of the yard, different levels of shade, different styles (trampoline and a soft sided one), and at least one should be close to the house with a view inside. If the dog is not reactive then provide a view of the world either through the fence or put a bed in an elevated position so he can see over the fence.
- Shelter from the weather.
Good quality kennel, should be under cover of a veranda and near to the house. The door should be facing away from the sun and prevailing winds.
- Toys, chews, and other things to do when not sleeping.

Padlocks on all gates are highly recommended to deter dog thieves and to prevent neighbourhood kids from opening the gate letting the dog out. Both are problems in Newcastle and the Hunter and all over Australia.



What does your dog enjoy doing? Does he like water? Provide a child's pool. Like to dig? provide a clamshell pool full of sand or a designated place in the garden where he's allowed to dig. Fill it with soft soil or sand and bury some toys there to encourage him to dig. Like to chew? Provide lots of safe toys and other items that he can chew. Like to watch the world go by? Provide a view to the outside such as a raised platform where he can lie and see over the fence. Or cut a hole in the fence big enough for him to look through and cover it with perspex or a metal grid.

Arrange for a friend or neighbour to come and take the dog for a walk or just spend time with him in the middle of the day. Send your pooch to doggy day care, even if only for one day a week. Some will pick up and return your dog.

Don't forget to get your dog out of the yard as much as you can. A good walk or run in the morning will help him be settled while you go to work. Jump in the car and go new places. Contact your council or look on their website to find the locations of off lead areas.

Become a dog foster carer so your dog has new dog friends to play with all the time. This has the advantage that if the dogs don't get along the foster dog can be moved. If they get on like a house on fire you can adopt your foster dog. Contact Dog Rescue Newcastle about fostering or adopting.

Backyard Fun for Your Dog!

Parts of this section were written by Trudi Waller of Clever Paw's Dog Training Services.

The principles outlined in this handout are intended as a general guide only. If your dog has shown aggressive behaviour toward you, your family or other people, you should speak with the trainer who gave you this handout.

Environmental Enrichment is for those times when your dog is left home alone. As dogs are social animals it is vitally important that you spend quality time with your dog each day, so these ideas should be used in addition to your normal family interaction and an exercise regime appropriate for your dog. You should take great care to ensure that there is no danger to your dog or others in any of these activities.

Toys, Toys and More Toys

There are many great toys on the market that are designed to keep your dog occupied: individual dogs will have different preferences. Food and treat dispensing toys are particularly great. Your dog will very quickly get bored with the same old toy so put out a few at a time and ROTATE them every few of days.

Here are three Australian websites selling a wide range of stimulating toys, many more than you'll find in your local pet supplies store:

<http://www.politepaws.com.au/store/>

<http://www.petsneedalifetoo.com>

<http://www.aussiedog.com.au>

Road Trip

Take your dog for a ride in the car when making those short trips such as dropping the kids off at school or going to the post office. It offers him a change of scenery. Even better if you stop at the park on the way home and give your dog a quick run. Please don't leave your dog

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alone in a vehicle as he is vulnerable to theft, harassment, and most of all death from overheating.

A Child's Wading Pool

A child's pool is very versatile! You can purchase shallow moulded plastic children's pools (such as clamshells) quite cheaply. You can fill it with water, sand, shredded paper or lots of balls. You can even put some blankets in an empty pool to make a nice bed for a large dog!

When filling with water ensure that your dog can easily get out of the pool and that it is just paddling depth. A pool in the shade on a hot day could save your dog's life! Encourage your dog to try it by dropping some toys or treats, even vegetables such as carrot pieces or whole apples which will float.

If you don't have a pool you could be to drop the same floating goodies or toys in your dog's water bucket. For small dogs a shallow plastic storage container such as an under bed storage container is sufficient size.

Designating Digging Spot

Dogs love to dig. You can let him enjoy this natural behaviour, and avoid messing up your lawn, by giving him a designated place to dig. You can set aside an area of your garden and dig it up, and mix the soil with sand to make a soft digging place. You can also get a child's plastic swimming pool such as a clamshell pool and fill it with sand or soft soil. Teach your dog to dig there by letting him watch you hide his favourite toys just poking above the surface. Randomly hide toys and hard chews in there when he's not looking to encourage him to explore just in case. Lay a trail of treats leading up to the digging pit and to the buried treasure.



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Window or Viewing Platform

There are some dogs in this world, as with some people, who just love to know what's going on. If your dog is one of these help him out by placing peepholes in the fence (cover with wire or Perspex to make sure he can't get his head or mouth through) or providing a raised viewing platform (far away from fences) made out of a pile of hay bales or mound of dirt. However, if he is highly excited by movement and it causes him to bark then this may not be appropriate for him.

Hay Bales

Place some straw or hay bales in your yard to give your dog(s) something to jump on and over and in between. Change the location and shape of the bales regularly to keep your dog interested. Dogs often enjoy sitting or lying in an elevated position. Hide toys or treat amongst the bales. Just be careful you don't stack the bales in any way that they could topple over onto a dog. Don't put them near a fence as this may enable your dog to jump onto a bale and over the fence. If your dog scatters the straw or hay it makes great mulch to put in your garden.

Kids Playground Equipment

Make a boring backyard more interesting by adding some children's outdoor play equipment or cubby house to give your dog places to climb, hide, rest and explore. Buy second hand online or at garage sales. Look for them on council pick up days.



The Kong & Treat Ball

You may be familiar with these marvellous pieces of equipment available from good pet product suppliers which can be stuffed with food and left for your dog to work on during the day. (Great for when you have to go to work, helps your dog to be keen for you to go to work instead of getting all worked up). Be aware with multiple dogs that using food games may cause some problems. Also, if your dog tends to scoff his dry food at dinner time, putting it in a Kong or Treat Ball can extend dinner time and create lots of fun for your friend. It is designed for your dog to roll the ball around to get the food out. Some dogs take all day and some take five minutes! You can smear peanut butter or cheese near the opening to encourage them to start with.

Recycle Plastic Bottles

Be sure to remove the bottle top, the plastic ring and the label from the bottle as these are a choking hazard. Punch or burn some holes in the sides of the bottle, large enough for pieces of dry food to fall through. Make sure there are no sharp edges. Fill the empty bottle with dry food for hours of fun. Supervise your dog with this toy.

Swinging Tyre

Hanging an old tyre from a tree can be a great way to entertain a boisterous dog. Place toys or treats in the tyre to ensure your dog is interested and gets some reward for the game. Make sure that the anchor point can take your dog's weight as well as the abuse and also that your dog cannot get caught up in it and become injured. Check out www.aussiedog.com.au for their 'Home Alone', a robust interactive dog toy.

Iceblocks

Place some suitable scraps of food (raw carrot, cooked rice, pigs ear, raw bones, chicken necks, liver treats etc) into an ice cream container or kong toy, fill with water (or chicken or beef stock) and freeze. You could even freeze a knotted rope into it so it could be hung somewhere or maybe bury it – as the ice melts the interest is renewed as treats come to the surface. A cool idea for the hot weather!

Recycled Rubbish

Empty milk cartons, cardboard rolls, egg cartons, cereal boxes and even pizza boxes can be used to entertain your dog. Place some treats in them and let him find the treats and have fun destroying the boxes. The



bonus is that you are provided with exercise picking up the pieces afterwards! Be careful though if your dog likes to ingest foreign materials.

Treasure Hunt

Before you go out to work in the morning or out for dinner at night, instead of giving your dog his regular dinner in a bowl take a cup of dry food and go out into your backyard and throw it all over the grass. That should keep him busy for a little while. Also try hiding his stuffed Kongs and bones so when you go off to work he is busy hunting for his food.

Recycled Marrow Bone

Next time you get marrowbones from your local butcher ask him to cut the ends off. When your dog is tired of chewing on that old marrowbone, don't throw it out because you can recycle it! Take the hollow middle section and smear peanut paste, cream cheese or sausage mince onto the small end then fill it up with either dry or canned food or a mix of both and cover over the other end with peanut paste or cream cheese. Your dog will LOVE you for recycling his bones.

Dog Walker

If you have a busy schedule then consider the services of a dog walker. Be sure to thoroughly check references, insurance and get details of how many dogs are walked etc. Ask the walker to vary the route to make for more interesting walks.

Dog Friends

Maybe your dog has some friends he could visit once a week, or who could come to visit him. Spending a day with a compatible friend is a great way to enrich your dog's life and provide some valuable socialization.

Doggy Door

Dogs that have access to inside the house often spend much of their day inside feeling safe and secure and SNOOZING!

More Ideas for Environmental Enrichment

The list is endless and only limited by your imagination. See what else you can add to the list. Remember the motto— do no harm, so make sure that any ideas will not be harmful to your dog. Some of these ideas may not suit your situation and may cause more problems – be sensible when choosing the best options for your dog.

1. Training sessions – trick, agility obedience
2. Dog sports - contact your local dog club, such as Newcastle All Breeds Training Club on Hillsborough Rd <http://newdog.org/> or Telarah Dog Training www.telarahdogtraininginc.com to find out what they offer.

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3. Doggy Day Care - Newcastle Pet Resort (in Williamstown) and Calm Dog kennels (in Fullerton Cove) are good. Newcastle Pet Resort will even pick up and return your dog.
4. Old balls eg: footballs, soccer balls
5. Rope toys
6. Frisbee
7. Tunnel
8. Hanging toys
9. Pig's ear/sheep's ear
10. TV or radio on timer
11. Treats in ice cubes floated in large water container
12. Flower and herb garden to stimulate your dogs sense of smell
13. Collection of 'smelly items' from outside environment
14. Barrels
15. Muffin Tin - make a puzzle toy by putting treats in each muffin space then put a tennis ball on top of each treat and let your dog work out how to remove the balls to get to the treats. You can also serve meals in the muffin tin (without the balls) to slow down fast eaters.
16. Scent trails - bury treats around back yard, under pots, wrapped up in old rags etc.
17. Put a bunch of cardboard boxes and tubes on the ground, put a treat in a couple of the boxes. Let your dog sniff out which boxes contain the treats.
18. Parcel – wrapped in multiple layers of newspaper with a dog treat as the prize in each layer.
19. Pizza delivery – let your dog tear up the nice smelly box, so long as he doesn't eat it.
20. Piñata – put holes in a milk carton, add treats, then hang it up (supervise your dog).
21. Move furniture around sometimes to create new interest.
22. Play hide n seek with your dog in a safe area. (The dog has to find you.)
23. Make a "**Snuffle Mat**" which is a deep shag rug made from a rubber mat and strips of fabric. Sprinkle treats in the mat and let your dog snuffle them out! How to video: <https://youtu.be/gaZeXOvnXik>
24. Toilet roll tubes - put a treat in an empty cardboard toilet roll tube (after all the paper is removed of course), fold over the ends, and let your dog get the treat out. Paper towel tubes and the long tubes from wrapping paper also work.
25. Toilet roll tubes in a shoebox - pack toilet roll tubes upright in a shoebox, sprinkle some treats into the tubes. Let your dog figure out how to get to the treats.



More Ideas

- The book [Play With Your Dog](#) by Pat Miller. Available in print or ebook.
- All Pets Education and Training's Boredom Busters page
<http://www.allpetseducationandtraining.com.au/boredom-busters.html>
- Search Youtube for "DIY Dog Toys" or "Homemade Dog Toys".