

Your complete guide to natural dog care and training

Whole Dog Journal™



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Support Group

Loving dogs leads to heartbreak for us all, eventually. But it's the price of admission.

BY NANCY KERNS

Thanks very much for the many compassionate messages of support and sympathy for the tragic loss of Tito and my former foster dog, Ruby. Many readers commented on the post I wrote on the Whole Dog Journal blog page (wholedogjournal.com/blog) about the incidents that led to the dogs' deaths (one as a result of injuries, and one by euthanasia) – and many readers told their own heartbreaking stories dog-aggressive dogs that they loved and tried to rehabilitate. It's impossible to refrain from blaming oneself for the many missteps that we can't help but take when trying to manage such an unmanageable situation, but it helps to know that none of us are the only ones who have experienced it.

Speaking of euthanasia, this issue contains an important article about the emotionally rending practice, and things to consider before making this final veterinary appointment for your terminally ill dog. While seeking a painless and peaceful end for two geriatric pets, trainer Jill Breitner had not one but two terrible experiences with a practitioner who claimed to practice “fear free” medicine. Breitner explains how to find a veterinarian who truly practices Fear Free or Low Stress handling, and why it's critical to employ one of these professionals at the end of your dog's life.

It shouldn't come as a surprise to any of you that life with dogs is highly emotional. Our canine companions can make us laugh hard *and* cry hard, sometimes on the same day! But I, for one, wouldn't trade my time with them, even the difficult ones, for anything else in the world. I've learned so much from working with them – and there is *always* more to learn. This month, I'm taking Training Editor Pat Miller's article on “demand behaviors” to heart in order to deal with a budding problem with Woody's newfound attention-seeking behavior. I feel just like any other dog-training student as I fail, again and again, to ignore his repeated efforts to engage me; he's

just so cute!

NK



Woody has learned that I can't resist him when he rests his chin on my mouse-hand and looks at me sadly; he almost always gets a little attention. Pat Miller's article on page 8 reminded me that I have to find the strength to ignore the cuteness!

1

PRODUCT
REVIEW

Super Balls

We've been rolling in balls for months and months, testing how they fling, fly, float, and forbear toothy treatment. The most fun and durable? Read on.



Not long ago, I took a walk with my dogs, a friend, and her two dogs. Three of the four dogs trotted ahead of us in happy exploration. The fourth dog is a “fetch addict” – the kind who focuses all his attention on two things: a ball, and any nearby human who looks like she might throw the ball. He’s either chasing a ball, bringing it back, or imploring his human companions to “Throw it! Throw it! Please throw it!”

But I was distracted, by keeping track of the dogs, conversation with my friend, and the gorgeous nature all around us, and I somehow managed to fling the ball in a crazy direction into some waist-high grass. It went so off-

course that Woody, my Lab/pit bull-mix – you knew he was the fetch addict, didn’t you? – completely missed seeing where the ball flew or landed.

I apologized to my friend, telling her I’d have to interrupt the walk to help Woody hunt for the errant ball. After a few minutes of searching through the field of weeds, my friend asked, “Is it really that important that we find it? I have dozens of old tennis balls I can give you . . .”

“YES we have to keep looking!” I told her. “It’s a \$17 ball!”

To which she responded, “How on earth can a stupid ball possibly be worth that much?”

Please allow me to count the ways!

We subjected the most appealing balls on the market to serious Lab tests – well, a serious Lab/pit bull-mix. Some of the balls were destroyed in the process. Others were ignored entirely. The winners were chased and chewed intensively – and have survived for months.

TOY-BUYING CRITERIA

When we buy dog toys of *any* kind, we're looking for a few traits:

- **Some irresistible quality** that attracts the majority of dogs they are offered to
- **Durability**, so they last long enough to pay for themselves in terms of the number of hours that they kept the dog happy and occupied
- **Safety**, so they pose very little or no risk when used as directed

We don't always consider the cost of a thing. Of course we want a decent value, but that's from a durability standpoint, not just the price tag. We agree that \$17 sounds like a fortune to spend on a ball. But given that some far less expensive balls don't last 10 minutes, we consider \$17 to be a *bargain* for a ball that lasts for months and months of only lightly supervised chewing and consistently provides hours of entertainment.

And, yes, we consider Woody's favorite ball, the \$17 one we spent 15 minutes looking for in waist-high grass, to be a *fantastic* bargain.

BALLS ARE THE BEST

Not all dogs who like to play with balls like to fetch; some dogs just like to walk around mouthing their favorite toy, or pushing balls around the house or yard with their noses. Fetch addicts like Woody often regard balls as the fetch item of choice. Flying discs have their proponents, but balls offer certain advantages over other toys and fetch items:

- **They usually have some bounce**, providing opportunities to leap and catch them in the air.
- **Being round, they roll**, so a smart dog can find ways to amuse himself when no one else will play fetch with him, by dropping the ball down stairs, off the sofa or porch, or down a slope outdoors. Similarly, they can be batted with a paw

and made to roll under furniture, giving a dog a great excuse to ask his owner for help (and maybe, just maybe, getting an extra throw out of the deal).

- **Balls fly well through the air** – not as well as discs, to be sure, but better than sticks or retrieving dummies, especially if a dog is lucky enough to have an owner with a Chuckit! or other ball-throwing assistance device.
- **Balls often have a great “mouth feel,”** and are fun for many dogs to just mouth, chew, or carry around.

WHAT TYPE OF BALLS WE WERE LOOKING FOR

When we started collecting balls to consider for our review, we realized there are many more types of balls than we could possibly include in a single review. We limited our selection to balls that could be thrown easily for dogs who like to fetch; we also included balls that had a little something extra to offer – additional features that engaged our test dogs and made them want to play with the balls even when no one else was playing fetch with them.

What are those “extra” features? Some of the balls have squeakers; one has crackly material inside. Most have a little – or a lot – of flex; you don't want a dog leaping up to catch a ball that is hard enough to break teeth. We tested one ball that glows in the dark and one that has a light inside for use at night.

We *didn't* include soft, stuffed (fleece-type) balls, nor balls whose primary purpose is to dispense treats. Note that a few of the balls we included *could* have treats inserted in them, but this isn't the primary design purpose of the ball.

It should be noted that we were looking for balls for medium to large-size dogs. While there certainly are toy and small dogs who like to play with balls, selecting safe, appropriate balls for them to play with is not quite as critical, since their jaws are usually

nowhere near as powerful as those belonging to larger dogs. In other words, it's much easier to find toys for them to play with that they can't chew up.

Many of the balls we selected for testing can be thrown with the help of a ball-flinging tool such as the Chuckit! or Planet Dog's Wood Chuck. The Wood Chuck comes in only one size, and is designed to fling balls that are 2½ inches in diameter – the same size as those used in classic Chuckit! launcher. Chuckit! is also available as a “large” ball launcher, meant to accommodate balls that are up to three inches in diameter. (We've noticed that it takes extra effort to jam these larger balls into the cup before flinging; they don't fit quite as nicely as 2 ½-inch balls fit into the Classic Chuckit!)

TOP PICKS

The balls that rose to the top of our review are ones that survived months of playing by fairly aggressive chewers without much more than cosmetic damage – and that the dogs themselves returned to play with again and again. There were a few balls included in our review that the dogs almost *never* selected to play with; for some reason, they were less engaging than the others. We retained these in the review and noted which ones they were; dogs with different preferences may enjoy them, though owners should take note that these toys were not tested as severely as the ones that got chewed daily.

The unequivocal favorite of all our test dogs is the Orbee-Tuff Squeak from Planet Dog. As the name suggests, this ball has a squeaker inside it, and after months of playing and chewing, not a



single squeaker has been silenced nor chewed out of any of the balls. Planet Dog rates this ball as “durable” and we’d have to concur. It’s nothing short of amazing, really – hence our stubborn refusal to let a badly thrown ball go missing.

In addition to squeaking, the Orbee-Tuff ball bounces, floats, and is soft enough for a dog to enjoy mouthing and squishing for hours and hours. It’s made in the U.S. of a nontoxic material that is free of latex, BPA, and phthalates. It comes in just one size, a Chuckit!-compatible 2½ inches.

Get this: All of Planet Dog’s balls, including the Squeak, are guaranteed. If they get chewed or destroyed, or if your dog doesn’t like them, you can return them for a replacement or a refund. Squeak!

Orbee-Tuff Recycle



At first glance, the Orbee-Tuff Recycle ball doesn’t seem like anything special. It doesn’t squeak or “do” anything unique. It’s a very soft, squishy, hollow ball – and all of our test dogs *loved* mouthing it like it was bubble gum. Because it’s so soft, it’s a great ball for catching in the air; it wouldn’t hurt any dog even if it bonked him on the head. At the same time, it’s incredibly durable. We have one of these balls that’s more than two years old and still hasn’t been chewed up.

The Recycle ball is so named because Planet Dog makes it from scraps of material left over from the other Orbee-Tuff toys; the material is melted down and mixed together, eliminating any waste. We applaud the earth-friendly approach! Like the other Orbee-Tuff toys, it’s free of latex, BPA, and phthalates, and can itself be recycled.

This is a relatively lighter-weight ball, so it’s difficult to throw as far as some of the heavier balls.



Chuckit! Max Glow

The Chuckit! Max Glow ball is also a chompable hollow ball, but the material it’s made of is a little stiffer than the Orbee-Tuff products, providing a bit more resistance to being squished in the dog’s mouth and flying farther when flung or thrown. It’s still quite durable, however; none of our test balls received any damage.

Obviously, the Max Glow is a great choice for playing fetch at dawn, dusk, or even at night. It “charges” fully with only about five minutes’ worth of exposure to a light source, and glows brightly enough to be easily found in the dark for 20 to 30 minutes. It comes in four sizes, with the smallest suitable for small dogs.

NEXT BEST: RUNNERS-UP



Kong Squeezz

This is Kong’s version of a squeak-removal-proof squeaky ball. It’s made of two pieces that are glued together, with the squeaker molded into the center. This makes it sound like it could be chewed apart, but none of our test dogs were able to do so.

This ball is a little stiffer and heavier than the Chuckit! Max Glow, so it throws nicely, but it’s still hollow and squishable enough to be squeaked to your dog’s delight. And it keeps squeaking even if the ball is punctured!

We love how Kong constantly innovates new products and supports the dog-training community. On the other hand, the Squeezz and the Squeezz Crackle are made in China, which we’re not wild about.

Safety First

It has to be said that playing with toys is an inherently risky activity for a dog. If there is a way to swallow something they shouldn’t, get some part of their anatomy stuck in something and hurt themselves, or get so swept up in play that they run into something, they will. Safety guidelines for playing with balls should include:

- *Make sure your dog has access only to balls that are too big for him to swallow. If a ball seems a little small in your dog’s mouth, it probably does pose a choking or swallowing risk.*
- *Supervise your dog when he’s playing with any ball. Many products can be chewed up; if the pieces are swallowed, they pose a risk of choking or gastrointestinal problems (“just” vomiting if you’re lucky; blockages or perforation if you are not).*
- *We worry about products made from materials that may not be safe for dogs to chew on or swallow. For this reason, we prefer to buy balls that are manufactured in the U.S. and made with chemically inert materials. Not being able to find out what a ball is made of is a red flag.*
- *Watch that bounce! Play fetch with your dog only in areas where he isn’t at risk of following a bad bounce into a street or into a river with a swift current.*



Kong Squeezz Crackle

The Squeezz Crackle is also a squishable, hollow ball made of pieces that are (fortunately securely) glued together. The material has glitter of some kind embedded in it, and the center of the ball has some sort of crackly material inside. Kong says the material is “durable and nontoxic.” If our dogs were to chew this ball open, we’d remove it from them quickly. Fortunately, none were able to puncture it.

The Squeezz Crackle is lighter and squishier than the Squeezz Squeak, and all of our test dogs enjoyed chomping on it.



Zogoflex Air Boz

West Paw Design offers a lot of interesting and beautiful products for dogs, and this is one of our favorites. Zogoflex is West Paw Design’s proprietary blend of recyclable plastic; Zogoflex Air is less dense than Zogoflex; it’s slightly squishy and lighter, making it safer for a dog to catch in his mouth than Zogoflex. West Paw says the material is latex-, BPA-, and phthalate-free, FDA compliant, and non-toxic.

It’s also highly durable. Our test dogs did their best to puncture or chew a piece off of this solid (not hollow) ball. After months of play, the ball has some tooth punctures in it, but is otherwise still intact. The ball is made in the U.S. and is guaranteed against dog destruction.



Rhinoplay Beast

We first saw Rhinoplay toys at a pet products show last summer. We absolutely loved their light weight and unique, puncture-proof material. The company claims the foam is environmentally safe and nontoxic, and guarantees the product. If your dog doesn’t like it, or destroys it in a fit of enthusiasm, the company will replace it.

But even the small-sized ball is too big to fit into a ball launcher, and both balls are too light to throw very far, so neither is a great prospect as long-distance fetch items.

That said, our big test dogs really liked batting the toys around the house.



Bounce 'n Play

Jolly Ball’s Bounce 'n Play holds a similar appeal; it’s a hollow, semi-soft ball that can be punctured again and again but re-inflates by itself. It’s not really a good candidate for playing fetch, but the big dogs enjoyed knocking it around the house.

FUN, BUT NOT FOR LONG

Then there were the balls that our test dogs really enjoyed – for a few minutes apiece. They are shown in the photo on the right, going clockwise from the left side.

• **Chuckit! Firefly LED Ball:** Just a few chomps, and the cap protecting the battery and light inside this ball had

WDJ’s Product Ratings

The product has no redeeming value that we can appreciate.

🐾 *We are including the product only because of its potential for improvement.*

🐾🐾 *The product has some value, as well as some serious flaws. Some of its features may be useful in certain applications.*

🐾🐾🐾 *A good product, with one or two significant flaws.*

🐾🐾🐾🐾 *As good as it gets. We strongly endorse the product.*

popped off. Once it was put back together, it was fairly difficult to get the light to turn on. It does light up beautifully, and is *great* for fetch on grass at night. If it bounced on hard ground, though, it’s likely the cap would fly off and you’d never find the pieces.

• **Chuckit! Ultra Squeaker Ball:** The squeaker was removed and the ball chewed up within an hour.













• **Grinz Treat Ball:** All the dogs liked the squishiness of this ball, but it had no durability whatsoever. It, too, lasted about an hour.

• **Squeaky Ball:** A super lightweight ball that might be fun for the very smallest canine fetch-fans out there. Our bigger dogs flattened it within a minute. 🐾

Nancy Kerns is the editor of WDJ. Her dog Woody chewed up all the balls below (and more).



SUPER BALLS . . . AND SOME SO-SO SPHERES

PRODUCT Company information	Overall rating	Price	Sizes	Notes
ORBEE-TUFF SQUEAK BALL Planet Dog, Westbrook, ME (800) 381-1516; planetdog.com		\$17	3"	Patent-pending squeaker is molded into the center of the ball. Recyclable and free from latex, BPA, and phthalates. Material contains a small amount of essential peppermint oil for a subtle minty scent. Made in the U.S.
ORBEE-TUFF RECYCLE BALL Planet Dog, Westbrook, ME (800) 381-1516; planetdog.com		\$15	3"	Made from recycled bits of Orbee-Tuff material left over from molding other Orbee-Tuff toys, and recyclable themselves. Soft and squishy and yet exceedingly durable. Hollow and light, so it's challenging to throw as far as some of the other balls. Made in the U.S.
CHUCKIT! MAX GLOW BALL Petmate, Arlington, TX (877) 738-6283; petmate.com		\$4 to \$11	Small = 2" Med = 2 1/4" Large = 3" Extra Large = 3 1/2"	Very durable hollow ball; stiffer than the Orbee-Tuff toys but still squishable in the dog's mouth. Glows in the dark for about 20-30 minutes after only about 5 minutes of exposure to light. Manufacturer says it's made of rubber. Made in Vietnam.
KONG SQUEEZZ BALL The Kong Company, Golden, CO (303) 216-2626; kongcompany.com		\$3 to \$5	Medium = 2 1/2" Large = 3" Extra Large = 3 1/2"	This ball is made of two pieces, one glued inside the other. The squeaker is built into the center of the ball; it's not a separate piece that can be removed. Our test dogs were unable to destroy or disassemble this ball. Made in China.
KONG SQUEEZZ CRACKLE BALL The Kong Company, Golden, CO (303) 216-2626; kongcompany.com		\$3 to \$5	Medium = 2 1/2" Large = 3" Extra Large = 3 1/2"	This ball is made of more than two pieces, one glued inside the other and containing some sort of crackly material in the center. Our test dogs were unable to destroy or disassemble this ball. Made in China.
ZOGOFLEX AIR BOZ West Paw Design, Bozeman, MT (800) 443-5567; westpawdesign.com		\$10 - \$15	Small = 2 1/2" Large = 3 1/4"	Large size is too big for launchers like the Chuckit!, and is kind of heavy; we wouldn't want a dog to get knocked on the head with an errant throw of this ball. This would be a great ball for a very large dog who ordinarily chewed up his toys; it's too big to be easily chewed – and guaranteed against damage! Recyclable, BPA-, latex, and phthalate-free, non-toxic, FDA-compliant. Made in the U.S.
RHINOPLAY BEAST GoDog (a subsidiary of Worldwise, Inc.), Novato, CA (415) 721-7400; godogfun.com		\$10 - \$13	Jr. = 3 1/2" Large = 5"	Junior size is difficult to find; large is too big for any except large dogs to pick up and carry. Very lightweight, unique, dense foam material. Ball is too lightweight to be thrown far – and yet very durable. Made in Taiwan.
JOLLY PETS BOUNCE-N-PLAY Jolly Pets, Streetsboro, OH (800) 232-7950; jollypets.com		\$8 to \$14	Small = 4 1/2" Med = 6" Large = 8"	These balls are not really for fetch, but are semi-soft, self-inflating, balls for play. They can be punctured and will still inflate. Company says its products are non-toxic and recyclable. Made in the U.S.
CHUCKIT! FIREFLY LED BALL Petmate, Arlington, TX (877) 738-6283; petmate.com		\$11	2 1/2"	It's difficult to get the lights in the ball to turn on; fortunately, they turn off by themselves after 20 seconds of no movement. Very bright and fun to play with at night (on grass or other soft surface). Made in China.
CHUCKIT! ULTRA SQUEAKER BALL Petmate, Arlington, TX (877) 738-6283; petmate.com		\$4 to \$8	Small = 2" Med = 2 1/2" Large = 3"	Bouncy yet squishy ball, made to fit in Chuckit! ball launcher. Dogs loved its squeak – but material was not durable enough to last beyond the first hour of play and chomping. Made in Vietnam.
GRINZ TREAT BALL Rogz, Cape Town, South Africa rogz.com		\$5 - \$7	Small = 2" Med = 2 1/2" Large = 3"	Outwardly, very similar to Orbee-Tuff balls: hollow and squishy. But the inexpensive material it's made of is not at all durable. Calling it a "treat ball" is a stretch; it's no more so than a number of the balls here.
SQUEAKY BALL Ruff Dawg, Worcester, MA (800) 772-3726; ruffdawg.com		\$6	3"	Package calls it a "super tough toy" – it didn't last one minute with our test dog. Made in the U.S. of non-toxic, recyclable material, a thermoplastic polymer. Made in the U.S.



Ask (Nicely) and Receive

Some of your dog's "demand behaviors" might be cute, but others can be annoying or destructive. Teach him a better way to get what he wants!



If your dog has learned to scratch at the door to get you to let him in or out, he can easily learn to do some other behavior – one that's more acceptable to you – to communicate his need to enter or exit. This time, you will teach him what behavior will get him the result he wants.

Your dog wants another treat. She barks at you, her shrill voice grating on your ears like fingernails on a blackboard. You're typing at your computer and your dog wants you to toss her beloved tennis ball. She nudges your arm persistently with the treasured yellow orb clenched firmly in her jaws, and paws at you when you ignore her nudging. Your dog needs to go out, and you hear her scratching at the back door, adding new gouges to your recently repainted door frame.

These are demand behaviors, often regarded in the dog world as annoying and inappropriate. But what if we looked at them from a different perspective?

A dog's demand behavior is her effort to communicate her wants and needs to you. Her demand behaviors increase in intensity because she is frustrated when she doesn't get what she wants. Imagine how frustrating it would be to keep asking for something and have someone deliberately ignore your requests. No wonder she gets frustrated!

When you think about it, it is a true marvel of our unique relationship with the canine

species that they are able to communicate so effectively with us, and we with them. Rather than spurning this gift, perhaps we should value and appreciate our dogs' attempts to make the world work for them – a world in which they often have very little choice or control.

"The power to control one's own outcomes is essential to behavioral health." This compelling quote is from Dr. Susan Friedman, faculty member in the Department of Psychology at Utah State University. (See "Pro-Choice," November 2016.) Susan is an outspoken advocate of changing behavior through facilitation rather than force. With this quote in mind, I propose we *reframe* our perception of demand behaviors

in order to give our dogs more power to control their own outcomes. Instead of calling these behaviors annoying, we could look at them as invaluable communications with potential to enhance the behavioral health of our canine family members, and figure out how to facilitate those communications.

Does that mean we have to always give our dogs everything they ask for? Not at all. It means that we need to give our dogs an acceptable forum for communicating their wants and needs. And we must also be clear about when we are not willing or able to give them what they want, in order to teach them to stop asking when we have signaled "Not right now!"

Let's look at how this communication could work for demand behaviors like scratching at the door, pawing, nudging, and barking. Then we'll discuss how to install the "off" switch.

SCRATCHING AT THE DOOR

Many dogs learn this behavior as a way to communicate to their humans that they *need* or *want* to go outside. It's important to make a distinction between the two.

Years ago, I had dinner with a friend whose blue heeler, Ranger, scratched at the door to go out – or come back in – literally every three minutes throughout the entire dinner. There is no way this dog had to eliminate that often, but to my friend’s everlasting credit, she calmly got up and let him out – or in – every time he asked. Annoying indeed, but my friend never raised her voice or refused her dog’s request. After dinner, he settled calmly on the living room rug as we chatted.

Some years ago, the dog training world came up with the idea of teaching dogs to ring a bell when they wanted to go out, thus saving thousands of door frames from potty-request damage. Humans who teach their dogs this behavior can now proudly boast of their dogs’ brilliance and bell-ringing prowess. That alone, however, would not have forestalled Ranger’s frequent door requests. Some humans know their dog’s elimination schedules, and just don’t respond to the bell when they know the dog is “playing” them to go out. That risks frustration on the dog’s part, as well as the possibility of human error, with a serious consequence

of not letting the dog out when she really *does* have to go.

What if, instead, you taught your dog two different cues – one that means “I have to go to the bathroom,” and one that means “I want to go out and play”? They are, after all, two distinctly different behaviors!

You can stick with the bell-ringing behavior as your dog’s potty-break cue, and use a different mechanism altogether, such as a buzzer or talking button (such as the Staples “Easy” button), for the play-break cue. Or simply acquire two bells that look and sound very different, one for potty and one for play. To make it easiest for your dog, you could install the potty bells at one door, and your second sound device – let’s say a buzzer – at a different door.

First, teach your dog how to activate each sound device by shaping her to touch them with a nose or paw. (For more information about shaping, see “Shaping Your Dog’s Behavior,” January 2017 and “Methods to Produce Better Behavior,” August 2014.) Then add your verbal cue – a different verbal cue for each sound device.

What you can do

- Reframe your thinking about “demand behaviors” so that you can value your dog’s attempts to communicate with you.
- Teach your dog a more acceptable “ask” behavior to avoid frustration for both of you.
- Teach your dog a “That’ll do” cue so you can communicate clearly to her that it’s time to stop asking – for now.

Say, “Want to go potty?” (or whatever phrase you plan to use), and encourage her to ring the bells. A jingle gets a verbal marker and an escorted trip outside to her favorite bathroom spot. (I use “Yes!” as my verbal marker – but you could say “Click!” if the word “yes” creeps into your vocabulary too often, which could weaken its power as a marker.) When your dog eliminates, click, treat, and praise, and take her back inside.

When she is doing this easily, hang the bells at her potty door, and gradually ask the question from farther and farther away, until she gets the idea of going to the bells herself from anywhere in the house to ask to go out.

Meanwhile, add your cue for the play buzzer, by saying “Want to go out and play?” and encouraging her to activate the buzzer. When she does, give your verbal marker and take her out for a round of her favorite game – fetch, chase, dig, or whatever she loves. Sometimes you can just let her out to play on her own, assuming you have a safely enclosed yard.

Again, when she is doing the behavior easily, attach the buzzer near the play door and gradually increase distance until she will go to the buzzer on her own to ask to go out.

Now you’re ready to add the “off” switch. (See “That’ll Do,” next page.) If she buzzes to go out to play, you can let her out to play or, if it’s not a good time or you think she’s been out enough, use your “That’ll do!” cue



Staples sells a touch-activated button that all but very small dogs can press to make it exclaim, “That was easy!” in your choice of 12 different languages. Tiny dogs have better success with a classic “call bell” – the sort of thing you’d find on a hotel’s front desk. Wireless, battery-operated doorbells are an even better choice if your house is large; you can stick the adhesive-backed button literally anywhere that’s convenient to your dog, and put the ringer in a central part of the house, so you can hear it from anywhere.

That'll Do! Follow These Steps to Install an "Off Switch"

I adopted my first Australian Kelpie in the mid-1980s. This is a breed I cheerfully describe as "Border Collies on uppers" – and I quickly realized that my ball-crazy Keli was going to drive *me* crazy if I didn't teach her an "off switch" cue.

I used her favorite toy – a tennis ball – to teach her that "All done!" meant there was absolutely no point in continuing to ask me to throw the ball. This then translated easily to other situations where I needed to tell her that we were done with whatever activity we had been engaged in – whether it was play, training, or casual interactions.

Here's how you can install an off switch in your own dog:

1 Start with a long play session – long enough that it's reasonable to expect that your dog will be able to end the game and relax.

With Keli, sometimes tossing the ball in the yard for a while was enough; sometimes it took climbing to the top of a steep hill and tossing the ball down the hill for her to fetch – over and over and over again.

The goal is to have him more or less ready to quit on his own – at least when you start teaching "All done!"

2 Give your "All done!" cue, and put the toy somewhere your dog can no longer see it – in a cupboard or in a backpack – and ignore any of your dog's efforts to re-engage with the toy.

3 Notify any other humans in the vicinity to also ignore your dog's attempts to get *them* to play.

NOTE: Training humans to ignore your dog's attempts to get them to play fetch might be the hardest part of this! You have to be very assertive with them! Alternatively, you can just leash your dog and move away from the most insistent dog lovers.

4 Watch your dog, so you notice and can reinforce him for any appropriate behavior that is *not* attention-seeking. If your dog stops staring at you and, instead, retreats to his bed, go to him and praise and pet him calmly (assuming he likes petting).



When a dog is this cute, it's hard to resist his attempts to get you to play – at least, until you've had to change your clothes twice before going to work, as he slimed your slacks or muddied your Manolo Blahnik's with a dirt- and slobber-encrusted ball he wanted you to throw. But you must resist once you've given the "All done!" cue. If you give in after you've given your cue, you are in for a lot more of the same.

5 Make sure to give your dog *plenty* of opportunities to engage in ball-chasing and other favorite activities daily. You don't want your dog to feel deprived after you tell him that you are done for the moment, but confident that he will have another opportunity later.

6 Generalize your "All done!" cue by using it in other training situations and recreational activities, so that your dog will realize that the cue means the end of *whatever* he is doing when he hears it. For example, you can use the cue when you've allowed your dog-who-loves-to-lick to kiss your face several times and then you've had enough.

Herding dog trainers commonly use "That'll do" as a "off switch" cue – and the expression was popularized by the movie "Babe." (Remember? It's when the talented swine was told: "That'll do, Pig!")

You can, of course, use whatever cue you want. But stick with it! Trust me, you will find it well worth the time and effort it takes to teach your persistent dog that enough is enough when you say it is.

to let her know that there's no point in asking again. You can also do this with the potty bells, but only if you are *absolutely sure* she doesn't really have to go out. Err on the side of generosity with this one, but if you routinely take her out, wait for her to go, click, treat, and then bring her back in, she's less likely to give false signals with the potty bells.

BARKING, NUDGING, AND PAWING

Dogs bark for a lot of reasons, but when they are barking at you with "that look" in their eyes, it's usually because they want something from you. This behavior can be particularly unwelcome because the repetitive barking can be quite annoying – to your neighbors as well as to you. Persistent nudging and pawing tend to not disturb neighbors, but can still be bothersome when you are trying to focus on something else.

As with scratching at the door, your first line of defense for these behaviors is to teach your dog a more polite way to ask for what she wants, whether that's a treat, a toy, or your attention.

If you want this to work, you will need to be sure to be observant so that you see and can reinforce the *new* "ask" behavior a good percentage of the time. If you don't, she'll likely revert to the old barking, nudging, and pawing – because those almost always

work to at least get your attention. It's hard to ignore a dog who is barking in your face, or putting long scratches down your arm! Here are some more acceptable behaviors that you can teach your dog to perform in order to "ask" for your attention:

- Go lie down on an "ask mat" provided specifically for this purpose.
- Nose-target to a plastic container lid attached to the wall. (One in each room, for easy communication.)
- Pick up a specific designated "ask toy" and drop it at your feet.
- Lie down and roll over or play possum (lying on back, tummy-side-up).
- Push a talking button provided for this purpose.
- Stand with front paws on a stool provided for this purpose.

You can see that the possibilities are endless – pick a favorite behavior or teach your dog something entirely new to be her "ask." Then, anticipate and preempt her barking, nudging, or pawing by cueing her "ask" behavior when you see her heading for you with intent in her eyes. Be sure reinforce the

behavior when she does it! Also, watch for her to offer her "ask" behavior, and reinforce her when she does.

Meanwhile, studiously ignore any inappropriate barking, nudging, or pawing so these behaviors can extinguish. Be aware that when you extinguish a behavior by removing all reinforcement, the behavior may get worse before it gets better. This is called an *extinction burst*, as the dog tries very hard to obtain reinforcement for a behavior that's worked well for her in the past.

Be careful! If you inadvertently reinforce your dog during an extinction burst, you will have taught your dog that the increased intensity level of behavior gets reinforced, and she will go there more quickly next time. (Note: If you have neighbors who will be inconvenienced by your dog's barking during the extinction process, I strongly recommend you let them know you are working on it – and provide a dozen home-baked chocolate-chip cookies when you do.)

Finally, be sure to use your "That'll do" cue when you end your reinforcement for the "ask" behavior; then, avoid reinforcing any "ask" behaviors that your dog engages in after your "That'll do."

HE CAN'T ALWAYS GET WHAT HE WANTS

The bottom line here is that you get the behaviors you reinforce. If your dog does things you don't like in her efforts to communicate her needs and wants, help her to learn how to communicate more effectively, thereby reducing frustration for both of you. It's up to you to find a more appropriate way to help her control her own outcomes and be behaviorally healthy. You'll both be happier for it! 🐾

Author Pat Miller, CBCC-KA, CPDT-KA, is WDJ's Training Editor. Miller is also the author of many books on positive training. Her newest is Beware of the Dog: Positive Solutions for Aggressive Behavior in Dogs. See page 24 for information on her classes for dog owners and trainers, and book purchasing details.



Nudging for attention can be quite annoying, especially when you're engaged in some other activity that involves your hands, like typing on your computer, drawing, painting, or embroidery. Reinforce your dog generously for performing a behavior that is incompatible with nudging.



When Past Is Prelude

Dogs often inherit more than their parents' looks; they may also receive the instinct and desire to do the work of their forebears – and it might behoove you to let them!

To keep her Dalmatians fit and well-behaved, dog trainer (and author of this article) Laurie C. Williams trains them for activities that make the best use of the Dalmatian's usually abundant energy, such as competitive obedience, rally, agility, tricks, and even coach-dog training. Williams is shown here with her Dalmatian, William, in the process of earning his coach-dog certification.

No one knows whether dogs chose humans or humans chose them, but whatever the case, we've been partnered for a long time. We welcomed *canis lupus familiaris* into our fold – and then much later began carefully and strategically breeding them to produce dogs who would readily perform various specialized tasks. They helped humans hunt, gather, and retrieve game, rid us of vermin, herded and guarded our flocks, and protected us from dangerous interlopers. Even the smallest toy breeds were ratters by day, and lap warmers by night.

Our liaison was one of mutual convenience. We provided food, warmth, and shelter, and in turn, they performed services we needed – but their work didn't preclude them from acting on their instincts and expressing behaviors that

came naturally to them. It was a great working partnership that still exists in some parts of the world.

In this country, though, few pet dogs have any sort of job to do. Seem like a nice gig? Free food and lodging, with almost no expectations? Well . . . except for the fact that they have to give up the right to act on their instincts and may no longer express many behaviors that come naturally to them. For a dog, it's maybe not such a good deal after all.

As a dog trainer and behavior consultant, I feel that it's *no wonder* that many of the “problem dogs” I'm paid to work with are expressing undesirable behaviors; they'd likely be perfectly fine if they were living in a different time and circumstance, able to perform the work and do the things they most enjoy doing. The simplest



Photo credit: Pierre Tadiff



This apparently flying dog is aptly named Pilot; she's a Jack Russell Terrier belonging to trainer Sandi Pensinger, of Living With Dogs, Capitola, California. Pilot participates in agility, barn hunt, disc dog, lure coursing (seen here), nose work, gopher hunting, and fetch. Sandi says, "I find the activities that tire her brain most efficiently are the sniffing sports. She is so much calmer after nose work and barn hunt than she is after the other sports."

prescription? Adopting a program of training and activities that suit dogs of their background can greatly enhance the dogs' lives and enable them to live more successfully in our world.

Most Popular Breeds

2016 American Kennel Club Statistics

RANK	BREED	GROUP
1	Labrador Retriever	Sporting
2	German Shepherd Dog	Herding
3	Golden Retriever	Sporting
4	Bulldog	Non-sporting
5	Beagle	Hound
6	French Bulldog	Non-sporting
7	Poodle	Non-sporting
8	Rottweiler	Working
9	Yorkshire Terrier	Toy
10	Boxer	Working
11	German Shorthaired Pointer	Sporting
12	Siberian Husky	Working
13	Dachshund	Hound
14	Great Dane	Working
15	Doberman Pinscher	Working
16	Australian Shepherd	Herding
17	Miniature Schnauzer	Terrier
18	Pembroke Welsh Corgi	Herding
19	Cavalier King Charles Spaniel	Toy
20	Shih Tzu	Toy

WHY DO WE CHOOSE THE BREEDS WE DO?

Many people choose their canine companions based on aesthetic reasons; they like dogs who are a certain size or color, or who have a certain type or length of coat. Some will admit they chose their dog because it looked "just like" one on TV or in the movies, or out of nostalgia for a childhood dog, conjuring fond memories of times gone by. They may have read or heard that dogs of a certain breed are "good with kids" or "hypoallergenic," or make "great apartment dogs." But how many people select their dogs based on what that type of dog was originally bred to do? Very few!

While the majority of dogs in the U.S. are mixed-breeds, the rest (an estimated 40 to 45 percent) are purebreds. Not all purebreeds are recognized by the American Kennel Club (AKC), but the AKC is the largest registry of purebred dogs in the U.S. It recognizes around 200 breeds, which it organizes into formal "groups," based on the work that the dogs were originally bred to do. According to statistics based on AKC registrations, among the current top 20 most popular breeds, five are

working breeds; three apiece are in the sporting group, herding group, toy group, and "non-sporting" group (this is merely a catch-all group for dogs that don't specifically fit in any other category); two are in the hound group, and one is in the terrier group. It's safe to say that the majority were bred with specific characteristics and behaviors that helped make them more efficient at their jobs.

Specific characteristics and a predisposition to certain behaviors are also inherited by mixed-breed dogs; the more genetic contribution a mixed-breed dog receives from a purebred gene pool, the more likely he is to act like his purebred ancestors.

Why does this matter? Knowing what drives and motivates a dog's forebears can inform his owner as to what is most likely to motivate him, lead to greater harmony and training success for that dog.

This is not to say that every individual dog within a breed should be expected to behave the exact same way. However, there are some distinctive breed-typical characteristics that have been selected and concentrated throughout that breed's history that could very likely affect behavior.

SPORTING BREEDS

Sporting breeds, Pointers, Retrievers, Setters, and Spaniels were bred to work alongside and help the hunter on land

Jill Greff has had Bernese Mountain Dogs since 2001. The breed was originally developed in the Swiss Alps, where the dogs helped with herding dairy cattle, sometimes pulling carts, and general farm chores. Jill competed her dog Katie (right) in herding and agility.



and in water, with a strong prey drive and the strength and stamina to hunt and swim all day if needed. Does this mean all Labradors will be natural swimmers? No. Or will all Pointers and Setters be “birdy”? Not necessarily. However, most that I have met through the years have been full of energy – and when that energy is not directed toward productive activities, it can manifest in a host of undesirable behaviors such as reactive behavior, destructiveness, excessive barking, and hyperactivity. The result can be the dog being deemed as stubborn and untrainable, which couldn’t be farther than the truth.

These breeds were specifically bred to follow cues and direction, making them extremely biddable – when their physical activity needs are met, which isn’t always easy. A walk around the block or a 20-minute game of fetch when you come home for work just might not be enough.

This doesn’t mean you must take up hunting! You can simulate that work by participating in field trials and hunt tests. These sports train your dog to use his instincts to point to, flush, and retrieve game. There are fewer things as exciting as watching a young dog’s instinct kick in! A baby Irish Setter who’s never seen quail before “pointing” at one hidden in the brush without ever being taught is a sight to behold.

Agility, bikejoring, fly ball, canicross, dock diving, and scootering are some of the other sports and activities that can provide both physical and mental exercise for active breeds. They

also promote team work between dog and owner, and help the dog’s build confidence.

Barbara Long of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, currently has shared her life with Gordon Setters for quite a few years and currently has two. “If they get enough exercise, they can be quite calm in the house,” writes Barbara. “Mine have been biddable but outwardly directed, independent, and persistent, which is pretty characteristic of the breed.” Barbara regularly participates in rally, tracking, and canine freestyle with her dogs.

At this writing, there are more than 24,000 Labs and Goldens alone listed for adoption on petfinder.com, and thousands of other sporting breeds and predominant sporting breed-mixes. I wonder how many of those dogs could have had been more successful in their homes if they’d had access to these types of activities?

WORKING AND HERDING BREEDS

Working breeds, such as Rottweilers, Doberman Pinschers, Boxers, Great Danes, were bred to be keepers of the castle and ward off trespassers, so it never surprises me when I receive a call from a worried owner of a 10-month-old Mastiff who seems wary of strangers. It starts to make even more sense when I learn the dog has never been to a group training class and rarely leaves the house or yard.

While all dogs need and benefit from early socialization, anyone choos-

ing a working breed should expect to socialize, socialize, socialize, and when they think they’ve done enough, socialize some more! Dogs of working breeds should be introduced to new people and places regularly – while young, *and* through adolescence and adulthood. Group training classes are a great place to accomplish this. The dogs will have the opportunity to meet new people and dogs of all kinds in a controlled, predictable environment.

Sports and activities that involve thinking and problem solving, such as tracking, scent work, competitive obedience and rally obedience, are great to try with many of the working breeds. Of course, many of the working breeds are used in the specific activities for which they were developed, such as water rescue (Newfoundlands, Portuguese Water Dogs), drafting and carting (Saint Bernards, Bernese Mountain Dogs, Greater Swiss Mountain Dogs, Leonbergers), and sled pulling (Siberian Huskies, Alaskan Malamutes).

Jill Greff of Ottsville, Pennsylvania, has had Bernese Mountain Dogs since 2001. “I have done obedience, rally, agility, and herding with my Berners. Mostly I found they respond best to positive reinforcement and are both food- and praise-motivated,” says Greff. “Berners do things in their time. It may look like they are moving slow, but in their mind they are hurrying! Patience is key.”

Primarily bred to herd sheep and cattle on working farms, today most herding breeds in the U.S. rarely live

that lifestyle. Instead they live in metro areas and suburbs, and occasionally in townhomes, condos, and apartments.

How does that work? Well, one thing is certain, if there is herding instinct there, they will still find a way to express it, often by herding the children, family cat, or worse, by chasing cars and any fast-moving object, which can be very problematic and dangerous. The challenge is finding activities that can help satisfy that urge safely and constructively.

Treibball is a great sport for herding breeds. Created in Germany a dozen or so years ago, this sport requires a dog to “herd,” or gather and drive large exercise balls into a soccer goal. It is a skill that does take quite a bit of precision training, but herding breeds tend to be very quick learners. Additionally, many herding breeds excel at dog agility and competitive obedience and rally as well.

HOUNDS, TERRIERS, TOY, AND “NON-SPORTING” BREEDS

Both hounds and terriers were bred to work *independently* of man – meaning, rather than directly follow our cues and directions, they followed their own instinct and drive. Hounds use their noses to locate everything from fox, rabbits, raccoons, wild pigs, and bears (and then use their keen sight and speed in pursuit). Terriers go to ground, using their powerful claws and shoulder muscles to dig for vermin and rodents.

This is important to know when training one of these breeds, as it can save your hours of frustration when they don’t seem to be listening and become easily distracted! I’ve

found it most successful to first use the highest-value rewards to motivate them to work with you, and then shape the desired behavior by rewarding increasingly close approximations of that behavior until you get the behavior you want. This can help keep a dog motivated when they otherwise might be distracted.

Most hounds and terriers have a strong prey drive, so take extra care when they are around small animals. Many toy breeds have terriers and other working breeds in their backgrounds, so one should never be surprised when a strong prey drive pops up.

A catch-all for a variety of breeds that don’t specifically fit in any of the other groups, the “Non-Sporting” group is quite a misnomer, as quite a few of the breeds so categorized were bred to be working dogs. Dalmatians are a good example of this, and a breed that is near and dear to my heart. I currently share my life with two of them, and they are the greatest Dalmatians most people meet, so I am told.

There’s a reason for that! Originating in Croatia, the Dal has performed various work through the years. They were war dogs that guarded the borders of Dalmatia, and were used to hunt vermin and wild boar, and as gun dogs, trail hounds, circus dogs, and, most notably, as carriage and coach dogs. Affectionately known as “firehouse dogs,” Dalmatians were trained to run alongside fire carriages to protect the horses and guard the firehouse.

It takes a lot of energy and stamina to run with horses for miles, and many today still have that same energy and stamina. Unfortunately, many are not given adequate outlets for that excess energy; my dogs do receive lots of daily exercise, and that’s likely the reason

I receive so many compliments. I train them in competitive obedience, rally, and agility, tricks, and even coach-dog training. My dogs run with horses! And when I can’t

What you can do

- If your dog is a purebred, or is a mixed breed dog that greatly resembles a specific breed, look into the historic origins of the breed to determine what sort of work the dog was developed to perform.
- Give your dog the opportunity to use his inherited gifts during recreation or work. For example, allow dogs that are known for scent work to smell, and dogs who were bred to herd or work to run (a lot!), whether at the dog park or on a jogging path.
- Look for opportunities to train your dog for activities that harness the skills and predispositions of his breed or type.

do this, they run alongside my bike. In addition, they have an opportunity and environment that allows them to play so hard, it’s likely the equivalent of running several miles. These are the necessary activities that result in not only “the most well-mannered Dalmatians” many have ever seen, but also, the most content and happy ones, too!

GET WHAT YOU WANT AND THEN WORK WITH WHAT YOU GET

When it comes to dog selection, it’s similar to picking your significant other: “The heart wants what the heart wants.” Regardless of what breed or type of mixed-breed dog you choose, you can enhance both of your lives if you acknowledge the instincts of his ancestors and focus on constructive ways to work with them, rather than trying to change your dog. Only then can we stop thinking something is “wrong” with our dogs, and start looking for ways to help them become the dogs their genes are telling them to be. 🐾

Canine education specialist, dog behavior counselor, and trainer Laurie Williams is the owner of Pup ’N Iron Canine Fitness & Learning Center in Fredericksburg, Virginia. See page 24 for contact information.



Aries, a 3-year-old Papillon owned by Cynthia Foley, of Warner, New York, illustrates how even toy breeds that have been enjoyed primarily as companions enjoy “working” with us in organized activities such as agility.



In Search of a Good Death

Euthanasia should be painless and peaceful, but an owner may have to take extraordinary steps to ensure it happens this way for their beloved canine companions.

Taking time to say goodbye to your beloved companion while discussing any last-minute concerns goes a long way to ensure a peaceful euthanasia.



my control because I hadn't foreseen them.

The stories were difficult to recount (they are described in "Back to Back Horror Stories," below right), but as a tribute to these animals, who didn't get the painless, peaceful end they were entitled to, I'd like to warn others about the things that can potentially go wrong during euthanasia. I *want* to stand at the edge of the world and scream, "No animal should suffer pain and terror at the end of her life during euthanasia, at

The final kindness we can do for beloved pets who are suffering from disease or painful effects of advanced age is to relieve and shorten their misery. Euthanasia should be painless and peaceful, giving a caregiver a last, loving embrace with her dog (or cat), and a memory of ending the pet's life in a quiet, dignified, fear-free, trauma-free manner. Many of us are at our most vulnerable at this time, wracked with sadness and distracted with deep concern for our companions – and, unfortunately, this may cause us to fail to ensure that the end we want for our pets resembles our hopeful vision of a peaceful end in any way.

Twice in the past year I went to a veterinary hospital to have an animal companion euthanized. One was my 20-year-old cat, Yogi; the other was a beloved friend's ancient, blind, deaf, Chihuahua, Hopper, whom I was fostering after my friend's death. In each instance, I wanted a smooth transition from this life to the afterlife for these much-loved, suffering pets – and in each instance, I was horrified during the process by events that were out of my ability to foresee or control. That is, they were out of

the hands of a veterinarian!" Instead, I'll try to turn my horrific story into an educational opportunity.

LOOK FOR PRACTITIONERS WHO ARE DEDICATED TO FEAR- AND PAIN-FREE CAREGIVING

There is no more appropriate time to engage the services of a practitioner trained in fear-free handling techniques than when it comes to euthanizing your pet. Fortunately, there are now at least three well-respected sources of education and certification for veterinarians and their staff (as well as groomers, daycare providers, dog trainers, and other pet-care professionals) on the topic of handling animals in a way that does not cause them additional stress or pain.

Dr. Sophia Yin, a veterinarian with a special interest in animal behavior and positive reinforcement-based training, is widely credited with pioneering methods of safely handling animals for husbandry and veterinary purposes.

When Dr. Yin realized that more dogs were being euthanized because of behavioral issues than medical issues, she went back to school (after earning her doctorate in veterinary med-

"There is no more appropriate time to engage the services of a practitioner trained in fear-free handling techniques than when it comes to euthanizing your pet."

icine in 1993). She earned a Masters degree in Animal Science in 2001 and started developing low-stress handling techniques in her veterinary behavior practice. She published a book about these methods, *Low Stress Handling*, in 2009.

After Dr. Yin's death in 2014, her business partners continued her legacy by establishing a low-stress handling curriculum and certification for veterinarians, vet techs, and any other animal-care professionals who want to learn to handle companion animals with the least amount of stress and defensiveness possible.

Pets who are less stressed feel more at ease in a hospital, from the minute they walk through the door, throughout their examinations, until they leave. Several levels of Low Stress Handling Certification can be earned by veterinarians and their staff, as well as other animal-care professionals, through Dr.

Yin's legacy, Low Stress Handling University (lowstresshandling.com).

Another certification program designed to reduce stress in pets in a hospital environment is called Fear Free (fearfreepets.com), which was founded by Dr. Marty Becker, a veterinarian with a practice in Idaho. Dr. Becker is also adjunct professor at several schools of veterinary medicine and has authored a number of popular books on animal health. Fear Free offers an ever-growing number of courses for veterinary-hospital staff on subjects that range from fear-free animal, transport, waiting rooms, examinations, and in-hospital protocols for sedation, anesthesia, and analgesia.

Individual Fear Free professional certification launched in early 2016. One of the next certifications that Dr. Becker plans to offer is called Compassion-First Pet Hospitals, wherein every aspect of a veterinary practice

is designed with the animal patients' emotional comfort as a priority.

Recently the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) began offering an online course in animal hospice and palliative care that includes euthanasia protocols that follow the Low Stress Handling and/or Fear Free philosophies. The certification program can be taken by veterinarians, vet techs, vet office staff, kennel workers, or anyone with an interest in this subject. See tinyurl.com/AAHA-hospice-course for more information.

These are the only certification programs available to veterinary professionals. Courses in understanding companion animal behavior, body language, and the emotional state of pets were not taught in veterinary schools when Dr. Yin and Dr. Becker were students (I'm not aware of any veterinary schools that include this information in

Back to Back Horror Stories

My cat Yogi was 20 years old, but the very picture of health until a malignant tumor took up residence in his mouth. It grew quickly and began causing Yogi much discomfort – so much so that he wouldn't eat. I didn't want my buddy to get to the point of immense suffering.

I moved about a year ago, and had looked for a veterinarian with Fear Free or Low Stress Handling credentials. I found a clinic that advertised itself as a fear-free hospital within an hour's drive, and had visited the clinic several times without being either impressed or dismayed. I made an appointment to have Yogi euthanized at this clinic.

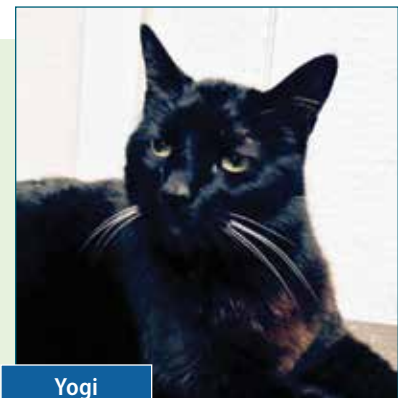
When the veterinarian entered the examination room, I told him I'd like Yogi to be sedated before the euthanasia drug was administered. He indicated that this was fine, and left the room. He came back with an assistant and a tiny syringe, saying, "This will sting a little but within less than five minutes he'll be completely sedated, though his eyes will remain open. Are you ready?" I said yes. He then said that after he gave the sedation injection, he'd leave and come back in five minutes to euthanize Yogi.

I'm not new to this procedure, but it *never* gets easier. As a vet tech, I assisted in the euthanasia of hundreds of pets; I've also supported friends, family, and clients

during the euthanasia of their pets, and was present when all of my own animals passed. But what I experienced that day haunts me.

Yogi was very weak, had recently stopped eating, and had failing kidneys. Many animals in this condition don't even notice an injection. I expected that he might feel a little prick and then slowly go to sleep – but that's not what happened.

When the vet injected the drug into the muscle of Yogi's hind leg, my cat screamed the loudest meow I've ever heard and, with a power he hadn't displayed in years, thrust himself backward almost off the end of the table. The vet said, "You can let him go." What?! I heard the words but my protective instinct kicked in; I was not going to let my frail friend crash to the floor! I was able to prevent him from falling off the table, but then he launched himself forward and upward out of my arms, flailing toward the wall. The vet and the tech stepped away from Yogi, as I flew to the other side of the table, catching him mid-air so he wouldn't crash into the wall. They then excused themselves and left the room!



Yogi

[Back to Back Horror Stories continued on next page](#)

Back to Back Horror Stories continued from previous page

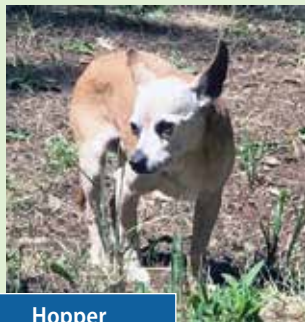
I sat with a now-comatose cat, limp, with eyes dilated and glassy. I held his fragile, soft, furry body – the same body that had just acted like super cat – and wept. What the hell just happened? I was in shock; the peaceful end I had hoped my friend would experience had instead turned hideously painful and traumatic.

A few minutes later, the vet and tech came back in, to give the final injection in a vein in Yogi’s hind leg. Within a minute, my boy was on his way to getting his wings to soar. As for me, the shock of Yogi’s last moments kept me silent except to say thank you as I picked up Yogi’s lifeless body to take home to bury.

That night, I couldn’t sleep, thinking how I betrayed my companion of 20 years by holding him while someone hurt and terrified him. I couldn’t shake the vision of Yogi’s last moments. Since I’d never experienced such a horrific euthanasia, I thought it was an anomaly – that his reaction was rare – and I vowed to disallow that drug, whatever it was, from being used on any of my animals again.

HORROR REDUX

Sadly, a few months later I would be facing another end-of-life decision, this time for a dear friend’s pet. My friend had passed away, and her spouse was having a tough time grieving her loss while caring for the special-needs dogs she left behind. In her honor, I asked if I could help care for the two senior dogs: Hopper, a 17-year-old, deaf, blind Chihuahua; and Buddy, a nine-year-old dog who was disabled with a spinal injury. My friend’s husband agreed, and I took them into my home.



Hopper

It soon became clear to me that Hopper was failing.

After a lengthy conversation with my friend’s spouse, we decided that it was time to let Hopper go, before his suffering was unbearable. Since I thought what happened with Yogi was an anomaly, I called the same veterinary practice to make an appointment to euthanize Hopper. Still, I planned to ask the veterinarian to use a different drug to sedate Hopper, so that the experience would be like all the other euthanasias I had witnessed. In addition, when I made the appointment, I asked for a sedative that I could give Hopper before we ever even got to the veterinary hospital; this little guy was blind and deaf and very vulnerable in his dark and silent

world, and I wanted to give him all the help I could.

Hopper was very relaxed in my arms as we waited in the exam room. The veterinarian entered, and asked if I wanted to sedate Hopper further before administering the euthanasia drug. I said yes – but added that I didn’t want him to use the same drug that he used with Yogi.

The doctor responded that it should be fine for Hopper, because it’s harder on cats than dogs; just a little prick and in a few minutes he’d be completely sedated. I was stunned, thinking, “Wow, really?! You know it’s harder on cats than dogs and you gave it to my cat anyway?” But at the same time, I had this tiny dog in my arms on the table, not knowing what was going on, unable to see or hear, pressing his body against mine. I didn’t want to prolong the experience. I decided to trust the doctor’s word, that dogs don’t react to this drug like cats do, and since Hopper was already relaxed from the sedative I’d given him, it would be fine. So I said, “Okay, if you think the same thing won’t happen, then it’s time; yes, go ahead.”

I held Hopper while the vet gave the injection into the muscle in Hopper’s hind leg. There was no reaction from Hopper, thank goodness. Phew! The vet left the room.

Five minutes later, Hopper was still sitting in my arms, as awake and relaxed as he had been since we arrived. The vet came back in and looked at Hopper, amazed that he wasn’t fully sedated. “Wow,” said the doctor. “I’ve never seen this before. He’s not sedated at all.”

“No, he’s not,” I said. “Perhaps the syringe was empty?”

The vet looked at me as if I was crazy. He said, “NO, I gave the injection.” I remained silent, having said what I thought to be true, that perhaps the syringe was empty. He said he would go get another injection.

When the vet came back in, I suggested that he inject Hopper’s other hind leg. He agreed, saying, “There must have been no circulation in that other leg and that’s why the first injection didn’t work.”

I held Hopper while the vet gave the injection – and this time, Hopper screamed, became Superman, and started biting at the air. Blind, he was in a state of sheer panic and pain as I held him, snapping wildly. I looked into the vet’s eyes with fire in mine. He left the room, saying he’d be back in five minutes. *Continued on next page*

their curriculum even now), and both sought to address that educational void.

If you love your veterinarian, but you don't think she is aware of these fear-free or low-stress handling educational resources, consider mentioning these certification programs the next time you and your dog see her. If she learned even a few tips on how to help pets be less anxious during vet visits, you'd all (client, patient, doctor, staff) be glad she did.

CONFIRM CERTIFICATION

It's possible for a veterinarian to independently seek out advanced education and earn competence in animal behavior and low-stress handling techniques, just as Dr. Yin and Dr. Becker did. However, I learned the hard way that pet owners need to be vigilant and ask for confirmation of whatever "low stress" or "fear free" marketing claims are made by a veterinary practice.

As a dog trainer, body-language expert, former veterinary technician – and certified Fear Free Professional myself – I knew that I wanted a compassionate and trained veterinarian and staff to help facilitate a smooth,

peaceful, and painless transition for my 20-year-old feline companion, Yogi. Having recently moved to a new area, I searched online for a veterinary hospital whose website referenced fear-free veterinary protocols. I was thrilled to find one about an hour away. The website had several mentions of fear-free visits and one whole page explaining how the practice owners made the hospital fear-free. When I called to make the appointment for Yogi, I asked whether they were versed in Fear Free protocols and was assured that they were.

But after not one but two traumatic euthanasia experiences at the hospital (see "Back to Back Horror Stories," starting on page 17), I found myself wondering about how the practitioners could possibly have credentials of any kind in fear-free or low-stress handling. I looked at the website again – and was stunned to realize that the language on the website was all in lower-case; there were no logos indicating the practice had either Fear Free or Low Stress Handling certifications.

I next emailed the customer-service representative at Fear Free asking if this hospital or any staff member

was certified by Fear Free. I received an email stating that no one in the hospital was certified and that a Fear Free representative would contact the hospital regarding the language on the practice's website. Within a few short hours, the language on the hospital website was changed, and now references how the business strives to make its veterinary hospital experience "stress free."

Lesson learned: Don't fall for buzzwords. Ask for proof of training, certification, or independent study, and insist on making an appointment with only those individuals who received the training that you want your veterinarian and technician to have.

EUTHANASIA PROTOCOLS

The veterinarian who euthanized my cat and my foster dog used the same drug, in the same way (intra-muscular injection) as a pre-euthanasia sedative. Both animals had a very strong adverse reaction to the injection of the drug; the injection traumatized them and their frenzied responses traumatized me.

The day after the second awful experience, I called the veterinary

Continued from previous page

The moment the door closed, Hopper collapsed in my arms. I held him close, apologizing to him and crying my eyes out. I couldn't believe this happened again. I was stricken because I had let Hopper down – I had let down his owner, my deceased friend! I was reliving Yogi's horrible experience, and beside myself with anger and despair – and it still wasn't over for Hopper.

Five of the longest minutes later, the vet and the technician came back in. They said nothing as they worked together to insert the needle into a vein and administer the euthanasia drug. I wept quietly, petting Hopper and silently imploring him to forgive me. Hopper's end, like Yogi's, wasn't painless nor fear-free. I felt this was a heinous crime and I was complicit. It was all I could do to drive home afterward, taking deep breaths to calm myself, wiping the tears that kept falling down my face, and talking out loud to both of my deceased friends, Hopper *and* his owner, the whole way. It was gibberish chatter to help me make it home.

I feel terrible that it took two awful experiences to investigate the drug that caused such pain and terror in the two animals in my care, as well as the credentials behind the "fear free" claim made on the veterinary practice's website, only to learn that the drug used in this way is not remotely the best protocol, and that no one in the veterinary hospital had any actual training or credentials in fear-free or low-stress handling.

After being upset to the point of immobility for days, I decided that I could, at the very least, try to prevent any other animals from suffering needlessly before being euthanized while their loving guardians witness their pain and terror. I don't want any animal to go through what mine did, or any guardian to have this haunting memory seared into their minds for the rest of their lives.

I am now on a mission to spread information about ways to do everything a guardian *can* do to ensure a good death for her beloved animal companions when it's time.

Before Making an Appointment for Euthanasia, Ask Questions

You will undoubtedly have a meeting with a veterinarian if your dog's condition is such that you are considering euthanasia as an alternative to suffering for days or weeks from a condition that is slowly or painfully killing him. That's the time to ask your veterinarian questions about her protocol for euthanasia and listen keenly to her answers; they will tell you if she's the right vet to help you and your pet at this most sensitive time.

Suggested questions:

- *Can I give my pet something at home, before our appointment, that will help with her anxiety about entering the clinic?*
- *Do you usually sedate dogs before euthanasia? If so, with what?*
- *What is your protocol for euthanasia?*
- *What drug or drugs do you use?*
- *How do you administer these drugs?*
- *I want to be with my pet the entire time; is that okay?*
- *What should I be prepared for?*
- *Will I have time to stay with my pet?*

Things to listen for in the veterinarian's answers:

- *"Pat" answers that indicate a rigid protocol, such as, "We always use this drug; it's the best one."*
- *An ideal response would be, "We will assess the condition of your pet on the day of euthanasia and then we'll decide on the appropriate drugs at that time."*
- *Patience and compassion, for your pet and you: Did it seem that the veterinarian really listened to your questions, or did you feel rushed?*

If you don't feel completely comfortable with the answers or conversation, it would be wise to look for another veterinarian.

Be advised that in some areas, there are practitioners who specialize in hospice and end-of-life care; also, many house-call veterinarians report that home euthanasia is a large part of their practice. One directory of these practitioners can be found at lapoflove.com.

If one of these specialists is available in your area and you can afford it (they may charge considerably more than a general practitioner would for euthanizing your pet), I'd highly recommend their services. I have found veterinarians who do home euthanasia to be deeply caring and compassionate; most vets who offer this service do so out of a strong desire to offer a highly personalized, unrushed experience.

Until my most recent experiences, all of my pets have been euthanized at home. I would have gladly paid any price for this service, but there aren't any of these practitioners where I live now.

clinic and asked for the name of the pre-euthanasia drug that was used on my cat and dog.

The drug is called Telazol. It's a mix of two other drugs, tiletamine and zolazepam. I called Zoetis, the company that makes the drug, detailing the reaction that my animals had. I wanted to find out if the drug had been used improperly, or if the reaction my pets had was typical.

The Zoetis representative told me that while Telazol is not contraindicated to use as a pre-euthanasia sedative, it's not the drug's intended primary purpose; its primary purpose is as an anesthetic on difficult-to-manage animals for short procedures such as wound management, not for a pre-sedation before euthanasia. In headline-size type, the Zoetis website says Telazol "Provides restraint or anesthesia for cats and restraint and analgesia for dogs undergoing minor procedures."

I also learned that the drug can sting badly when administered intramuscularly (IM).

I posted my experience on a closed Facebook group for Fear Free Professionals and asked what drugs or combinations of drugs do they use for a painless, peaceful euthanasia. None of the veterinary professionals in the Fear Free group used this drug in the manner that this vet used it.

All the veterinarians who responded said they mixed Telazol with other drugs and administered it subcutaneously (under the skin, commonly referred to as "sub-q") rather than IM, because it's less painful that way. Some didn't use this drug at all, preferring other drugs, such as the combination of xylazine and ketamine best known by its veterinary nickname, "pre-mix." Several vets also noted that "pre-mix" can *also* sting when administered IM. When an animal is emaciated, or has very little muscle tissue (as in the case of many senior cats and dogs, including my two wards), these drugs can cause so much pain when administered IM, that many of these vets inject the drugs sub-q, instead.

The most important bit of

information that I gathered is this: There is no single right way to administer a pre-sedation drug or drug cocktail to every animal, every time. Ideally, the veterinarian should take into consideration a number of factors:

- The patient's species (cat, dog)
- The patient's physiological condition (obese or thin; well-muscled or lacking adequate muscle tissue; good or poor circulation; etc.)
- The patient's behavior (calm, or agitated and fearful)

In fact, if a veterinarian uses the exact same drug protocol on every single animal, or will tell you exactly what drug will be used over the phone (before seeing the animal), it's a red flag; this is absolutely a case in which the veterinarian should see and assess the animal's condition before deciding which drug or drug combination to use, and how it will be administered (intramuscularly or subcutaneously).

I understand that no practitioner can sedate and euthanize without causing pain or fear in every animal, every time. But now I also know that a skilled, caring practitioner should see and evaluate each animal as an individual, and customize the drugs used and the way they are administered for the unique needs of each animal.

TRUST YOUR GUT

I teach my dog-training clients to listen to their gut when choosing a vet, groomer, trainer, or boarding facility; if something doesn't feel right, I tell them, you must be prepared to walk out the door and find a more appropriate person for your beloved pet.

But I have to acknowledge how difficult it is to do this when you are emotionally vulnerable and bracing oneself for something as upsetting as

euthanasia. I spent *days* before each appointment preparing for the fateful day of letting these beloved pets be free of their suffering; even when things happened that I was unhappy about, I didn't stop the procedure and decline to go through with it at that time.

I wish I had the presence of mind to stop the procedure when I noticed that the vet didn't touch or greet either one of my animal companions before injecting the sedative. I should have walked out the door right then and there.

Trust me: You don't want your last memory of your dog to be him screaming in pain and panic. My friends suffered and all I can do today is help educate as many people as I can in their honor. 🐾

Trainer Jill Breitner has been training dogs since 1978 and is a body language expert. She is the developer of the Dog Decoder smartphone app, which helps people identify and "de-code" their dogs' body language for a better understanding. She is also a certified Fear Free Professional and certified in Animal Behavior and Welfare. She lives on the west coast and uses Skype for dog training consultations all over the world. See page 24 for contact information.



The "Art" of Euthanasia

BY SALLY J. FOOTE, DVM

A few days ago, I read Jill Breitner's post in a veterinary group about euthanasias that were stressful for both her and her pets. From the account, it would seem that the injection of the pre-sedative drug stung, causing a sudden panic reaction in the patient. While the procedures were uneventful after that point, the memory of the pets' dramatic reactions haunted their guardian.

In more than 30 years as a veterinarian, I have heard of a number of accounts similar to this. In my career, though, I have dedicated my practice to using only low-stress techniques, especially at the end of life. This is the *art* of euthanasia.

The veterinarian did warn Jill that the injection of sedative might sting her pets, but she was completely unprepared for the *degree* of her pets' reactions, which seemed aberrant and needlessly painful. And unfortunately, the pets' startling reactions are a major part of the last memories she has of her animal companions.

It is not just the last breath. As a young veterinarian, I would wonder why owners would cling to their elderly dogs, asking only for a nail trim and refusing an exam. I finally asked one owner if I could examine her dog so I could help her

Continued on next page

keep her pet healthy. She responded, “Okay, but don’t tell me I have to put my dog down.” I sincerely reassured her that this was not my agenda, and was finally able to examine the dog. As I worked, she shared the story of her previous pet’s euthanasia, and her fears about facing that event with her present senior dog. The grief-filled memory from 15 years earlier was ever-present in her mind, especially with her current senior dog.

INDUSTRY IN TRANSITION

I didn’t have any training in euthanasia as a veterinarian. That may seem hard to believe, given that veterinarians may perform that procedure daily. All of my training came from on-the-job experience. Today, many vets receive training about client grief, and yet still learn little about the actual euthanasia procedure. Training in how to provide a peaceful relief of suffering is not standard in the veterinary educational system.

Pre-euthanasia sedation cocktails were first introduced by anesthesiologists in the 1990s. I attended a presentation on the topic in 1997 and never did a euthanasia without pre-sedation again.

At the North American Veterinary Conference in 2012, Dr. Dani McVety, founder of Lap of Love, a network of veterinary hospice providers, shared her euthanasia protocol, stressing the importance of a pre-euthanasia experience with no pain, reliable sedation, achieved with only one injection. She clearly defined the art of euthanasia. I felt good that my staff and I were already providing that care and had embraced it through our commitment to Low Stress veterinary practice.



THE PATIENT EXPERIENCE IS PARAMOUNT

Providing a pain-free, smooth transition from awake, to asleep, then no longer alive, is not easy. The veterinarian and staff must have a plan for minimizing the patient’s pain, stress, and anxiety – *before* the appointment if possible. All thought must go to using drug mixtures that will not add to the patient’s present pain or anxiety. Drug delivery needs to be non-stressful to allow the body to respond in gradual relaxation.

That said, it’s important to realize that there is no single protocol or drug that will deliver this experience for every patient, under every circumstance. And in some practices, veterinarians and staff are held to strict protocols. In other practices, there may be a lack of understanding the holistic nature of euthanasia. Some pain with injection cannot be eliminated, yet one can choose the best route of administration to minimize this. Low-stress options include diluting injectable drugs, using local anesthetic creams to reduce the pain of injection, and using a butterfly needle rather than a catheter.

The setting for euthanasia is also not always the most calm. Yet the focus must be on a smooth transition from life to death, no matter what setting, age, or status of the patient. The best patient experience is what provides the best client experience. The last memory is always the one freshest in our minds and what we carry with us.

While I cannot make all euthanasia experiences perfect, I can take many steps and custom-tailor the products I use to each individual patient, in order to provide something as close to perfect as possible. I hope that the low-stress veterinary-care movement gains ground, and that education in the art of euthanasia becomes standard. Our patients and the people who love them deserve this. 🐾

Dr. Sally J. Foote is owner and head veterinarian of Okaw Veterinary Clinic in Tuscola, Illinois. Dr. Foote’s certifications include Low Stress Handling Silver Certified, Fear Free Professional, and Animal Behavior Consultant by the International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants. Dr. Foote is also currently the President of the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior and the Executive Director of CattleDog Publishing, the legacy of Dr. Sophia Yin.

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BOOKS AND VIDEOS

WDJ Training Editor Pat Miller is author of many books on force-free, pain-free, fear-free training, including:

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