

VOLUME 12  
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# The Whole



# Dog Journal™

A monthly guide to natural dog care and training

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# "Rescues" That Aren't

*When adopting, research and take your time.*

BY NANCY KERNS

Last month, I used this space to tell the story of my former neighbors, who bought a puppy from a puppy mill; despite my warnings to them, they didn't really "get" that they were buying from a puppy mill until they received an underaged, very ill puppy who is clearly not the breed she was purported to be. I used the story to implore readers to take their time when looking for their next dog, never buy a dog sight unseen from the Internet, and to adopt from shelters and rescue groups.

Three days before I sent this issue to press, I received the following note, containing very good advice, from a subscriber:

"What a terrible experience your neighbors had with their Poodle puppy. Sad to say, they could have had the same experience with a Petfinder adoption. Adopting a dog over the Internet can have unintended results: dogs who are sick, aggressive, or misrepresented (age, temperament, even breed). Not all organizations presenting themselves as "rescues" on Petfinder are nonprofit (yes, some are puppy mills) and not all obey state laws about health certificates. Some circumvent these laws by having adopters meet the transport vehicle in a parking lot just over the state line.

"Please advise your readers to work with a local rescue organization, where they can meet the dog before adoption. A good local rescue will take back the dog, for any reason, for the life of the dog."

In a bizarre coincidence, *later that very day*, I got a boots-on-the-ground lesson about *exactly* what the letter writer had described: "rescue" groups who promote "adoptions" of dogs on Petfinder.com, but turn out to be warehousing dogs and selling them, perhaps at a profit.

I happened to visit a shelter that was housing over 100 small dogs that had been seized days before in a raid on a so-called "private rescue" organization. All the dogs were small and very cute. They

were also were infested with fleas, as well as every type of worm that exists. Almost every long-haired dog was matted down to the skin and had to be shaved. The shelter was free-feeding the dogs because every time they refilled a bowl, the dogs would reflexively rush for the food and fight. A dozen or so dogs were skin and bones – clearly, the ones who couldn't or wouldn't fight for their share. There were also a few dogs with injuries and others with severe skin problems.

There were also three litters of puppies, and many intact dogs.

The "rescue" charged \$250 to \$350 per dog; according to the Petfinder.com description of this "rescue" facility, the "adoption fee" helped pay for "neuter/rabies/dhlp [sic]/bordatella [sic]/worming/frontline, microchip, grooming, and heartgard." If those things were done at all, they must have been done just after a dog was paid for.

The shelter, in contrast, actually does all those things before a dog is adopted. And it charges \$80 for most dogs – small or large, cute or not. There are exceptions: the director frequently waives fees if it helps place a dog in a qualified home.

I'll write more about this subject in the December issue. I'll pass along information from experts on how to determine if a "rescue" is truly rescuing dogs, or profiting from their misery. For example, the owner/operator of the "rescue" conducted monthly adoption events at WalMart and Petco; in fact, potential adopters were always met elsewhere, not at the "rescue" facility. That should have been a warning sign right there.

Finally, I'll ask Petfinder.com what, if anything, it can do to weed out losers like this one. And not just Petfinder; I've been told there are equally bad actors among the "breed rescues" listed on the American Kennel Club's website.

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# Alternate Rewards

*Five things to do when your dog can't have, or won't take treats.*

BY PAT MILLER

**F**ood rewards are powerful tools in the hands of a good positive trainer. Food is considered a *primary reinforcer* because it has innate value; a dog doesn't have to learn to like food through association. Using a clicking sound made by a clicker (or other reward marker, such as the word "Yes!"), followed by a high-value food treat is a quick and easy way to send your dog a powerful positive message about which behavior he could repeat to get reinforced again.

Food is also commonly used in classical conditioning and counter-conditioning, to create and build a dog's positive association with a specific stimulus.

But what do you do when your dog can't or won't take a treat? It depends on the reason he has to decline the food offering. Try these tactics:

**1 If he's too distracted:** Try a higher-value treat. High-value treats for dogs *tend* to be meaty, smelly (like sardines or smelly cheese), or fatty treats,

but for some dogs it might be slices of banana or apple, baby carrots, cat kibble, or buttery bits of toast. Experiment with a wide variety of foods to find out what trips your dog's treat trigger. If higher-value treats don't work, remove your dog to a less distracting environment, gradually increasing distractions as he's ready to handle them.

**2 If he's too full:** Schedule your training sessions *before* meals when he's hungry, rather than after. If he was eating treats but stopped, try a different high-value treat. Eventually even the *best* treat can get boring.

Also, cultivate a backup list of *secondary* reinforcers for use when he's full. These may include playing a game with you (chasing a ball, tugging on a rope toy, chasing after you), being petted, or hearing cheerful praise. Be sure they're really reinforcing to him! Does he seek them out? Then they are reinforcing. If he turns away or declines them, they are not.

**3 If he's too stressed:** Reduce your dog's stress level. If you're doing counter-conditioning, reduce the intensity of the aversive stimulus to a level where he'll notice the stressor but still take treats. Increase the distance between your dog and the stressor, decrease the movement of the stressor, turn down the volume, etc. If you're out and about – for example, on the first night of a training class – just hang out in a corner with him until he habituates to (gets used to) the new environment and starts taking treats. Use backup reinforcers to improve your dog's emotional state: a game of tug may cheer him up enough to eat. If he won't eat from your hand, he may take treats dropped on the floor.

**4 If he's not feeling well:** If your dog is too sick to eat treats, or in too much pain, you shouldn't be training. You can improve his associations and relieve his stress with acupressure and calming massage. There's a calming acupressure point in a dog's ear: gently rub his ear flap, near but not at the very end, between your thumb and fingers in a circular motion. If he can't eat due to pending surgery, or to avoid carsickness but is otherwise fine, use alternative reinforcers.

**5 If you've run out:** When you find yourself digging for treat crumbs in the corners of your pockets, you'll be glad you have that list of alternative reinforcers! Also, don't be afraid to delve into your own lunch box or refrigerator for treat alternatives. As long as you avoid the obvious no-no's like chocolate, cooked chicken bones, grapes, raisins, and onions, most of what we call "human food" is fair game for dog treats. 🐾



**This dog sometimes gets overstimulated outdoors and becomes too distracted to take treats. In this case, her owner (Sandi Thompson of Bravo!Pup Puppy and Dog Training in Berkeley, CA) uses a game of tug with a high-value toy: a rabbit hide.**

*Pat Miller, CPDT, is WDJ's Training Editor. Miller lives in Fairplay, Maryland, site of her Peaceable Paws training center. See page 24 for more information.*

## Microchip Registration Locator Tools Launched

### New databases aspire to make it easier to track down microchip registration

There are currently seven different pet identification microchip registries in the U.S., making it difficult to track down a found pet's owner even when a scan finds a microchip number. Adding to the confusion, the chip's manufacturer may not be the company that registered the chip. For example, I had a dog whose microchip was made by HomeAgain but registered with AKC Companion Animal Recovery (CAR). All the registries that exist in the U.S. will register their competitor's chips as well as their own, but most charge a fee for doing so.

Two companies have emerged with Internet-based products that make it easier for rescuers to quickly locate the owner of a dog with an implanted identification microchip: the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) launched its PetMicrochipLookup.org, and Chloe Standard introduced ChecktheChip.com. Each built a website with a searchable database of microchip numbers, and attempts to return information about where a microchip is (or is most likely to be) registered.

The AAHA's Universal Pet Microchip Lookup Tool relies on collaboration with microchip manufacturers and distributors, and so far supports only four of the main registries: AKC CAR (Companion Animal Recovery), HomeAgain, PetLink, and resQ. Three other registries – Banfield, AVID, and 24PetWatch – are not currently supported, but AAHA hopes to expand its coverage in the future.

When you enter a microchip number into the AAHA Universal Pet Microchip Lookup Tool, it tells you where that microchip has been registered, the registration date (which may not be accurate at this time), the registry's phone number, and a link to the registry's website. If a microchip number is not found in any of the supported registries, it gives you contact informa-

tion for the most likely manufacturer and registries – including ones not supported by the database.

Chloe Standard, a private start-up company in Mountain View, California, launched its website, ChecktheChip.com, in August. The company hopes to finance its operation with advertising.

According to a representative for Chloe Standard, the company asked various microchip registries for lists of their database numbers (minus owner information), but, the company says, the registries have been slow to respond. This means that in many cases Chloe Standard can identify only the chip's distributor. When you enter

confirm that the contact information they have is up to date. AAHA suggests that you contact the registry directly if your registration is not found in its database.

### Our tests indicate . . .

I entered several identification microchip numbers in both ChecktheChip.com and PetMicrochipLookup.org, with mixed results.

When I entered the number of a microchip that was issued in 1995 and enrolled in two registries, AAHA's website correctly identified both registries. ChecktheChip.com did not recognize the chip number.

When I entered an AVID microchip number that had never been registered, AAHA's site was able only to identify the chip as an AVID product and gave me AVID's phone number. ChecktheChip returned AVID's contact information, implying that the chip had been registered there – a confusing result.

I tested four HomeAgain chip numbers, only one of which had been registered. AAHA correctly identified the registered chip and returned a phone number for that registry; for the other three chips, it gave me the contact information of three likely registries (HomeAgain, AKC CAR, and PetNet in Canada) and

the chip's manufacturer, Digital Angel. ChecktheChip returned only HomeAgain's contact information for all four.

Both databases are still in an early stage of development, but as of this writing, AAHA's Universal Pet Microchip Lookup Tool appears to be the more useful.

– Mary Straus



**It's not enough to make sure that your dog has an identification microchip implanted under his skin; the chip number should be registered with at least one registry, and perhaps several.**

a microchip number that is recognized, you are given the name of the registry, its phone number, and a link to the company's website. In cases where a number is not recognized, ChecktheChip provides contact information for six registries: AKC CAR, HomeAgain, PetLink (which is misidentified on the site as ResQ), 24PetWatch, AVID, and Banfield.

To be certain that your dog's identification microchip is properly registered to you, and your contact information is current, enter his microchip number into both search tools. If the registration is found, you should check with the registries to

For more information:

AAHA Universal Pet Microchip Lookup Tool: [PetMicrochipLookup.org](http://PetMicrochipLookup.org)

Chloe Standard  
ChecktheChip.com

## Variety Is Important for Nutritional Completeness

### Renowned nutritionist deplors reliance on single-recipe diets

Marion Nestle is the award-winning author of *Pet Food Politics: The Chihuahua in the Coal Mine*, the story of the massive pet food recall in 2007, and the upcoming *Feed Your Pet Right: The Authoritative Guide to Feeding Your Dog and Cat*, due out in May 2010. A renowned professor of nutrition, food studies, and public health, Nestle's interest in nutrition extends to both people and pets.

In her "Pet Food Politics" blog, Nestle recently wrote about the limitations of nutrition analyses and databases as aids for creating healthy diets for people. I was surprised by how closely her words echoed my own feelings in relation to the drawbacks of relying on a single recipe developed with a spreadsheet to feed a dog.

Referring to the databases used to create these recipes, Nestle says, "If you give it even a moment's thought, you realize that the nutrient contents have to vary with growing location, soil conditions, climate, transportation, and storage, so **the amounts given in the database can only be approximations of what you are actually eating** [our emphasis]. The data aren't meaningless, but they don't mean nearly as much as people think they do."

Exactly. Too many recipes created with spreadsheets, including those from veterinary nutritionists, provide only minimal amounts of important nutrients. If the foods used to create these recipes don't match up to the numbers in the database, the recipes are likely to be lacking in some areas. Feeding the same recipe and nothing else for long periods of time may lead to nutritional deficiencies.

The same problem can occur when you feed one commercial food exclusively. Foods that state they are formulated to contain "complete and balanced" nutrition for dogs may not actually do so for a number of reasons. These include how the food is stored; changes in the ingredient sources; and whether laboratory analysis of the food itself was conducted to confirm its nutrient content (as opposed to tests of a similar food from its maker, or a feeding trial to determine its nutritional adequacy).

I recommend choosing at least two or three different brands, using different protein sources, and rotating among them. If one food is deficient in some areas, the odds are that the next food will make up for it, especially if it's made by a different company – though *that* food may be

deficient in other areas.

Spreadsheets have their place, especially when you need to control specific nutrients due to health problems. A spreadsheet can help you determine how to limit phosphorus in diets for dogs with kidney disease, for example. Even then, it's safer to use multiple recipes that include different ingredients rather than always feeding the same recipe.

Nestle goes on to say, "We know from studies using experimental animals that it is extremely difficult to induce nutrient deficiencies in animals that are fed a variety of foods providing sufficient calories. **The best way to avoid nutrient deficiencies is to eat a variety of minimally processed foods.** If you do that, you don't have to worry about specific nutrients."

Rather than relying on a single recipe created with a spreadsheet to ensure that your dog's nutritional needs are met, feed a wide variety of fresh foods in appropriate proportions; that's the best way to create a healthy diet for your dog, as well as for your family. – *Mary Straus*

For more information:  
foodpolitics.com, by Marion Nestle

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## New Pennsylvania Law Bans Five Home Surgeries

### Law targets puppy mill operators and dog fighters; vets may still perform procedures

Late August headlines that blared about Governor Ed Rendell signing a bill "banning" ear-cropping, debarking, tail-docking, performing C-sections, and removing dewclaws were a little misleading, as the new law only applies to surgeries that are performed by *non-veterinarians*.

Rendell was quoted as saying, "House Bill 39, which clearly defines the painful and inhumane procedures on dogs that constitute animal cruelty, takes the next important step for Pennsylvania in protecting dogs," said Rendell. "Until now, these cruel practices could be carried out by dog owners without proper training and without supervision by a licensed vet, which could lead to long-term injury, pain

and, in some cases, death to these defenseless animals."

An owner who has these surgeries performed legally must now keep a record of the surgery, including the vet who performed it, as well as the location and date where the surgery was performed. Any person in possession of a dog upon whom any of the listed surgeries have been performed is in violation of the new law (not just the person who performed the surgery) unless they have a certificate from the veterinarian who performed the procedure, or a certificate from their county treasurer (at a cost of \$1) showing that the procedure was done before the law became effective. Violation of the law is a summary offense, punishable by a fine of up to \$300 and/or



PHOTO COURTESY HOPKES

**Obviously not the work of a veterinarian.**

90 days (maximum) in jail.

The new law further protects dogs by making it a third degree felony to steal or acquire in any manner an animal for the purpose of fighting. – *Pat Miller*



# Easy Riding

*Help your canine be a contented companion in the car.*

BY PAT MILLER

Contrary to the advice I offer to clients and WDJ readers, I admit that I'm sometimes careless about taking my dogs in the car with me. I don't always use crates and seatbelts on short trips to town, although I always do on longer travels. Just recently, however, my husband and I loaded up all five of our dogs for their annual well-pet visit to a veterinarian, and I did take the precaution of crating everyone rather than risk canine chaos on the highway. Other than Bonnie's panting, it was an experience in car-ride serenity, and I vowed to crate everyone, always, on future rides.

Granted, my dogs aren't the worst in the car. They don't sit in my lap, leap over seats, get into fights, hang out the windows, do laps around the back of the van, or bark at everything outside the car. Other than Bonnie, who pants a lot and sometimes Even so, they're safer in crates. Loose, they are a distraction, which decreases my driving safety. Not as bad as texting, but still!

In case of an accident (heaven forbid!), loose dogs can become dangerous

free-flying projectiles, slamming into seats or passenger's heads, smashing into windshields, or escaping through broken windows to face highway hazards. Years ago, my brother lost his lovely Australian Shepherd this way; she survived the accident unscathed, but ran into highway traffic and was killed by a car. Also, loose, protective dogs can deter rescue workers from helping injured humans in the car.

At the very least, with a carload of crated dogs I don't have to worry about someone forgetting their "Wait" training at our destination, leaping from the car when the door opens, and possibly getting hurt or lost.

So how do you take a dog who is accustomed to free range of your car when traveling, and turn him into an "easy rider?" You start outside the car.

## Crates are great

I personally prefer crates to seat belts; I think they're safer. My dogs are all quite accustomed to crating, so it's simply a matter of loading and securing crates in the van – that's an important step that many people carelessly skip – and finally, putting the dogs in crates.

One small exception is Bonnie, who came to us with an aversion to riding in cars and sometimes still needs a little extra coaxing to "go to bed" in the car. With five dogs, I'd have to put the two back seats back into the van in order to use seat belts, and anyway, I find the prospect of getting all five into harness and buckled in place a little cumbersome. I can't imagine how mothers of multiple small humans do it!

If your dog isn't already crate-happy, you need to start there, with crate-training at home, before you can expect him to be happy about being crated in the car. (See "10 Quick Crate Training Tips," page 9.) When your dog has come to love his crate, it's usually a simple matter to transfer his crating behavior to the car, especially if he already loves car rides.



**If a crate won't fit in your car, use a seat belt, properly attached to a well-fitting, strong harness (never a collar). Otto is wearing a combination harness/seat belt called the Roadie, available from [RuffRider.com](http://RuffRider.com), (818) 505-9315.**

If your dog, like Bonnie, finds the car aversive, you'll need to work on that piece first – but you can work on it at the same time you're teaching him to love his crate in the house. Just don't put them together until he loves both. When he's happy to run into his crate and stay there, and when he's happy to hop into the car on cue, then put the crate in the car and work on them together. When that's working well, you're ready to start the engine.

## Seat belts are spiffy

There are times when seatbelts are a better option. If your car is smaller than your dog's crate, you have no choice. If, despite your best efforts, your dog hates crates, a harness and seatbelt will be easier for you and less stressful for him. If you prefer

### What you can do . . .

- Select and purchase the car safety option that is best suited for you, your car, and your dog.
- Take the time to desensitize and train your dog to use your chosen safety equipment.
- Commit to taking appropriate safety measures every time your dog rides in the car.



seatbelts, there are several good products on the market. Each has strengths and weaknesses, so be sure to study up and select the one you think best meets your dog's needs. (See "(Seat) Belt Your Dog," WDJ February 2004). Your dog should ride in the back seat when belted; air bags can be as deadly to canines as to young children. Alternatively, if he must ride in front, disable the airbag and make sure the seatbelt arrangement doesn't allow him access to the driver's lap. Features of the best seat belt products include:

- A strap that hooks directly into the seatbelt mechanism rather than loops over the belt, to minimize belt play and reliance on the seat belt mechanism should you stop suddenly. (Note: It may be difficult to find products that offer this feature.)
- Good quality parts and materials that can hold up in case of impact.
- Reinforced stitching at stress points.
- Options for customized fit.
- Easy to put on the dog.
- Comfortable for the dog.

When you have identified and purchased the best seat belt for your dog, take time to acclimate him to the apparatus well before you intend to use it. This is accomplished by classically conditioning him to the harness itself, then giving him a positive association (treats!) with wearing it, and ultimately being strapped into his seat.

To condition your dog to the harness, have him target his nose to it. Hold out the harness toward him, and when he sniffs it, click a clicker (or mark the moment with another reward marker such as the word "Yes!") and quickly give your dog a treat.

When he's eagerly touching his nose to the harness, hold it so he can put his head through it, and click and treat him for that. You may have to ask him to target through the opening to your hand at first, but he should quickly start offering to "put it on" himself. (For more on target training, see "Right on Target," February 2006).

Note: For an excellent video on conditioning a dog to a piece of training equipment, go to [abronline.com](http://abronline.com), click on "Videos and Podcasts" and then on

"Conditioning an Emotional Response." You will see trainer and author Jean Donaldson conditioning her Chow-mix, Buffy, to a head halter – not my favorite piece of equipment, but the principle and procedure is the same.

### Training tips

If for some reason you simply cannot crate or belt your dog safely in your car, at least take the time to train him to ride quietly, and do not let him hang out the window.

Again, start outside the car by making sure you've trained a solid "down" and "wait" or "stay" (see "Wait Versus Stay," April 2009). Then practice in the car, with the car sitting still, engine off, you in the driver's seat, your dog in the back seat. You can reinforce his down at first with treats, but fade the treats as quickly as possible and replace them with calm praise – you won't be able to reinforce with treats while you're driving!

When your dog will lie on the back seat quietly for 10 to 15 minutes while you read a book, start the engine. That may be enough to get him excited; if so, practice having him lie down in the back-seat with the car's engine running yet parked, preferably in a shady and well-ventilated area!

### A few more car thoughts

There are a number of products and practices that can improve the quality of your and your dog's car-travel experiences:

- **Covered crates:** Another benefit of



**The Calming Cap doesn't blind a dog; he can see through the sheer material. But it reduces the intensity of his visual stimuli, which helps calm many reactive dogs.**

the crate is that you can cover it. If your dog is reactive to stimuli outside the car, a cover over his crate can make life happier for everyone – he doesn't react to what he can't see, he stays calm and below threshold, and you aren't startled while driving by his sudden outbursts.

- **The Calming Cap:** For a reactive dog who is either loose or seat-belted in the car, the Calming Cap is a useful tool for reducing arousal to outside stimuli. The Calming Cap, created by Trish King (training director at the Marin Humane Society) for use with dogs who get over-aroused in cars, is a sheer nylon hood that covers the dog's eyes. He can see shapes but not detail, so he's less reactive to the reduced



**Properly installed, the VentGuard keeps your dog from jumping or falling out of an open car window – but only a window that is open about five to six inches.**



intensity of the stimulus. Calming Caps are available from Premier Pet Products, premier.com or (800) 933-5595.

■ **Exercise:** A tired dog is a well-behaved dog. A well-exercised dog is far more likely to behave well (and safely) in your car than one who is brimming with energy. Give your dog a good workout before you take him in the car, at least until his car manners are solid. If you can't do a good physical workout, tire him mentally with brain games (see "A Puzzling Activity," June 2008).

■ **Open windows:** Everyone knows dogs like to stick their heads out car windows. Not everyone knows how hazardous that can be. Debris can fly into your dog's eyes at high speed and cause injury, even blindness. "Doggles" – goggles for dogs – can help protect his eyes, but there are other hazards. Your dog can also ingest harmful particles through his nose and mouth.

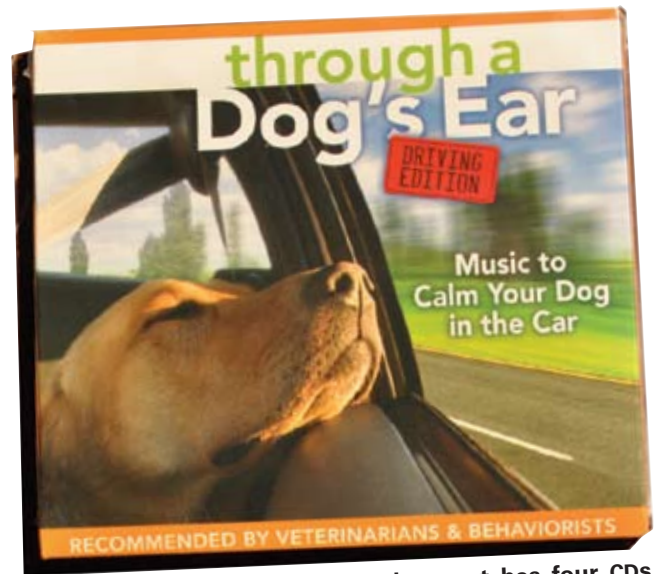
A dog who hangs out a car window can suffer far worse than getting hit by a bit of airborne debris – he can fall out of the car! I was driving through downtown Hagerstown one day, behind a car with a Beagle hanging out an open window. Just as I thought, "Uh-oh, that's scary," the little dog fell out of the window onto the road in front of my car. I slammed on the brakes, pulled over, and helped the driver retrieve his thankfully unharmed dog.

If you must leave car windows open for your dog, please install one of several safety products designed to prevent such accidents such as the Breezeguard (an expensive but well-made product, available from muttmanagers.com, 866-653-5631), or a Vent Guard (an inexpensive but much less secure item, available in many pet supply chain stores and online outlets).

■ **Calming products:**

I spray Comfort Zone/DAP, a stress-reducing product, in Bonnie's crate to help reduce her stress. Calming aromatherapy products (especially lavender) misted in your car may also help keep your dog calm. Also consider an Anxiety Wrap (available from anxietywrap.com, 260-344-1217) or even a snugly fitting T-shirt; this sort of swaddling can calm anxious dogs.

I've also seen good results from playing one of the "Through a Dog's Ear" audio CDs for an anxious dog. A company called BioAcoustic Research and Development has developed four music CDs meant to calm anxious dogs, including one just for driving with dogs. The "driving edition"



BioAcoustic Research and Development has four CDs designed to calm anxious dogs; this one is for the car.

also includes some helpful instruction on preparing your dog for a calm car ride. These are available throughadogsear.com, (800) 788-0949. 🐾

*Pat Miller, CPDT, is WDJ's Training Editor. Miller lives in Fairplay, Maryland, site of her Peaceable Paws training center. Pat is also author of The Power of Positive Dog Training; Positive Perspectives: Love Your Dog, Train Your Dog; Positive Perspectives II: Know Your Dog, Train Your Dog; and Play with Your Dog. See page 24 for more information.*

## Getting Bonnie Past Her Fear of Cars

Bonnie came to my family (adopted from the shelter at about six months of age) with an already installed strong aversion to cars. She didn't even want to walk past a car, and once inside would pant heavily, pace (if not restrained), and often vomit. What to do?

A trainer at my Level 2 Behavior Modification Academy needed a dog to work with, so I happily lent her Bonnie. Susan Sarubin is a Peaceable Paws Academy graduate and owner of her own training business, Pawsitive Fit LLC, in Baltimore, Maryland. I know her well, and was perfectly comfortable delivering my girl to her hands for a week of behavior modification under my supervision.

Susan used a systematic shaping procedure to teach Bonnie to jump into my van voluntarily. At the

same time Bonnie was getting much more positive classical association with the van, simply through its association with the clicker and positive training.

Look at the van – click and treat! When Bonnie was repeatedly looking at the van in exchange for clicks and treats, Susan held out for a tiny step toward it. Click and treat! By the end of the week, Bonnie was offering to jump into the car with the engine off. I continued to work with Bonnie after Susan was gone, repeating the process with the engine on, adding the crate, then driving a short distance, all with lots of clicks and treats.

Today Bonnie will jump into the van and happily crate up. She still pants a little when we're moving, but no longer throws up on our drives. I'd call that a success!



Trainer Susan Sarubin works with Pat Miller's car-fearing dog. It took only a week to convince Bonnie that hopping into the van is fun.



## 10 Quick Crate Training Tips

**1. Toss irresistibly yummy treats inside the open crate.** If your dog hesitates to go in, toss them just inside the crate so he can stand outside and eat them. If that's still too scary, scatter treats outside the crate until he's comfortable in its presence. Each time he eats a treat, click your clicker, or use your verbal marker to indicate he's performed a rewardable behavior. Yes, you are marking the behavior of eating the treat! If you time it so that you use your marker just before he eats the treat, you don't need to feed another treat after the marker. If your marker is late, then give him a second treat as well.

**2. Toss treats incrementally farther into the crate** until he's stepping inside the crate to get them. Drop them in through the top of a wire crate, or the side grates, to position them deeper in the crate. Click each time he eats a treat.

**3. When he'll enter the crate easily, click and give him treats while he's still inside.** If he stays in, keep clicking and giving him treats. It's okay if he comes out; toss another treat and wait for him to re-enter. Don't force him to go in or stay in.

**4. When he enters the crate to get treats without hesitation, start using a verbal cue** such as "Go to bed!" or "Load up!" as he enters. You'll eventually be able to send him into his crate with the verbal cue.

**5. When he's happy staying in the crate, gently swing the door closed.** Don't latch it! Click, treat, then open the door and allow him to exit the crate.

**6. Gradually increase the time you keep your dog contained** in the crate with the door closed before you click (or use another reward marker) and give him a treat. Sometimes click and reward him without opening the door right away.

**7. When he'll stay in the crate with the door closed for at least 10 seconds without exhibiting any distress, close the door, latch it, and take one step away.** Click, return, reward, and open the door.

**8. Repeat the previous step, varying the time and distance you spend away from the crate.** Intersperse longer durations with shorter ones, so it doesn't only grow increasingly more difficult for him to earn a reward. Increase the number of times you click and treat without opening the door, but remember that a click (or other reward marker, such as "Yes!") must always be followed by a treat.

**9. Leave the crate open when you aren't actively training.** Toss treats and favorite toys in the crate when your dog isn't looking so he never knows what surprises he might find in there. You can even feed him his meals in the crate to help him realize his crate is truly wonderful.

**10. Another trick to motivate him to want to go into the crate is to take a particularly smelly, enticing, food-stuffed Kong or marrow bone and tie it to the back of the crate, inside.** Close the door so he can't get in. His frustration at not being able to get it will motivate him to go in later when you do open the door.

Some dogs can do the whole crate training program in one day. Some take several days, and a few will take weeks or more. If your dog whines or fusses about being in the crate, don't let him out until he stops crying – unless you think he may legitimately have to go to the bathroom, or he's having a panic attack. Otherwise, wait for a few seconds of quiet, then click and reward. Then briefly work, with shorter periods of time between clicks and treats. When he'll happily enter his crate in the house and stay in it for extended periods of time without protest, you're ready to move his crate to the car for more training fun.

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# What a Treat!

*How to identify healthy dog treats – there is such a thing!*

BY NANCY KERNS

**S**urely there is no such person as a dog owner who never gives his or her dog a treat. We all like to see our dog's tail wag, and his face light up with attentive anticipation, right?

But how do you know that the treats you give him are healthy? It's actually pretty simple. As with every food you buy (for yourself or your dog), it's all about the ingredients.

If you do not already read the label of every food item you consider buying, get in the habit! Most of the information you need to know in order to determine the product's quality is legally required to appear on the label.

## What to look for

We suggest that you start with the ingredients list.

Ingredients are listed on the label by weight; there is more of the first ingredient on the list present in the treat than the second ingredient, and so on. (One

exception: If equal amounts – by weight – of different ingredients are present, the manufacturer can list those ingredients in any order; that is, as long as they are still in order relative to the other ingredients). The first few ingredients on the list are the most significant; since they comprise the majority of the content, they should be especially high in quality.

What constitutes quality in a pet food ingredient? Actually, the same attributes that indicate quality in human food denote quality in pet food. Top-quality ingredients are as fresh, pure, and minimally processed as possible; **whole food ingredients** are better than by-products or food "fractions." For example, "wheat" is better than "wheat flour." "Wheat flour" is than "wheat bran and wheat germ." The more highly processed and reconstituted an ingredient is, the more opportunities it has for adulteration and contamination, and the more nutrients it loses.

It stands to reason that the freshest

## What you can do . . .

- We make it a point to say this every single time we discuss treats: Don't buy dog treats at the grocery store, unless you *also* do each of the following:
- Read the ingredients panel of any treat you consider buying. Pass it by if it contains artificial preservatives and/or colors, animal products from unnamed species, or animal by-products.
- Check the ingredients list for foods your dog may be allergic to or intolerant of.
- Don't forget that you can use real, fresh food for treats! Offer your dog bits of cheese, cooked meat, and pieces of fruit and vegetables, and determine which he likes best.



These are just a few examples of some top-quality treats, containing organic ingredients, grass-fed meats, and natural sweeteners and preservatives.

ingredients available to U.S. food makers will be grown in the U.S. While some manufacturers argue that their oversight of foreign ingredient providers is reliable, we strongly prefer **domestic ingredient sources**. The only exception may be those ingredients that are near-impossible to obtain from U.S. sources, such as free-range, organic venison. Even so, if we found a treat that contained domestically sourced free-range, organic venison, we'd favor it over a product containing free-range, organic venison from New Zealand.

Ingredients that are sourced as close as



possible to the manufacturer (locally sourced ingredients) are good. Again, they are necessarily fresher than ingredients that require shipping from across the country. That's good for the environment, too.



Every ingredient on the label should be an easily recognizable food; there should be no question what the source is. For example, "meat meal" or "animal fat" could come from just about anywhere. In contrast, "chicken" comes from chickens, and so does "chicken fat." If you can't determine what species of animal a meat

or fat came from, you should not feed it to your dog.

**Organic ingredients** are good; they are less likely to be adulterated with contaminants, and they receive extra scrutiny from inspectors. The more organic ingredients, the better.

**If a sweetener is used, it should be natural and food-based**, and used in moderation. Applesauce, molasses, or honey are better than artificial sweeteners. We disapprove of *any* sweeteners in dog food, but we're talking about *treats* here: something the dog may not get every day, and something he'll get only a few of. A little natural sweetening in a treat is okay.

If a treat is preserved, it should contain a **natural preservative**. Vitamins C and E (the latter is listed as "mixed tocopherols") are effective and safe preservatives. Some treats contain no preservatives at all; these should be stored properly and used promptly.

### Ingredients to avoid

While you are examining the list of ingredients for quality components, make sure the treat does *not* contain any of the following:

■ **Artificial preservatives**, including BHA, BHT, ethoxyquin, potassium sorbate,

## The Caloric Content of Treats

It's long been one of my pet peeves that dog food manufacturers are not required to put the caloric content of their products on their labels. It seems that many food makers don't seem to think that dog owners are smart enough to use this information to help determine how much their dogs should be fed in order to maintain a healthy weight. (I'm sure some aren't, but hey! Some are!)

I applaud the pet *food* companies that do include the caloric content on the label voluntarily – which means the *treat* manufacturers that include this information should get a standing ovation.

Why should treat makers get extra credit? Because treats are, by their very definition, more desirable and delicious than regular food. And dog treat makers frequently achieve "desirable and delicious" the same way that human treat makers do: with extra fat, sugar, and salt. Fat is the worst offender in terms of adding calories; a gram of fat contains about 9 calories. In contrast, a gram of carbohydrate or protein contains about 4 calories. Salt, of course, is noncaloric.

However, the more palatable a treat is, the more a dog will want it, and the harder he will work to get you to give him more than he really should receive.

"No problem!" some people say. "I'll just reduce how much of his food I'll give him!" He may need to have his total food intake reduced a bit anyway, but in general, it's a bad idea to replace more than about 10 percent of his nutritionally "complete and balanced" diet with a decidedly *not* complete and balanced food (some vets suggest no more than 5 percent of his diet). Few treats are formulated with vitamins and minerals in the proper amounts and ratios, based on their caloric content, to represent a properly "complete and balanced" contribution to your dog's diet. If incomplete and unbalanced treats replace a significant portion of his complete and balanced diet, it follows that your dog won't receive all the nutrients he needs.

So, how much should you feed your dog, and how will

treats affect that? As author Mary Straus explained in our September issue, "Resting energy requirement (RER) is the number of calories per day your dog requires for just basic needs . . . To determine your dog's RER, convert his *ideal* weight in pounds to kilograms by dividing by 2.2, then multiply that number by 30 and add 70."

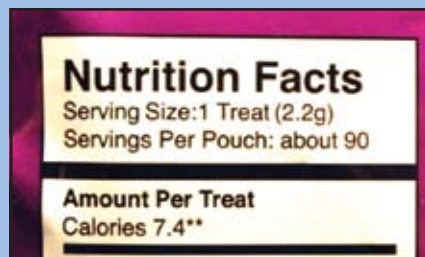
For example, for my dog Otto, I would use 65 pounds as his ideal weight. I divide this by 2.2 (which is 29.54 kg). Multiplied by 30 plus 70 is 1,026.36 calories – Otto's RER. I want to make sure that no more than 10 percent (rounding a bit, 103 calories) of these calories are treats.

Well, Otto's favorite treat is hot dog,

and the ones I buy to use for his training treats contain 130 calories per hot dog. Yikes! When we go for a walk or to a training class, I generally bring *two* hot dogs. I cut them into *many* tiny pieces, but still, on these days, he's getting more than 25 percent of the calories he should be eating in one day from an extremely unbalanced and certainly incomplete food.

So, why isn't Otto hugely fat – or showing the signs of nutritional deficiencies? To answer the former, on the days when we walk or train, he gets a lot more exercise – enough to burn off the extra calories. As to the latter: I've only had him for a year and a half – and he certainly doesn't get two hot dogs *every* day! But I should definitely adjust this treat habit – start mixing in some lower-calorie treats, and saving the really fatty hot dogs for just the most difficult behaviors I want to reward – before it results in health problems brought on by nutritional deficiency.

These are the sort of things you should be considering when you make treats a regular part of your dog's diet. Do the math; it's not that difficult! And look for the caloric content on the label of your favorite treats. If it's not there, check the company's website, or call them and ask. If they can't give you the information, don't buy that treat! It's *very* basic information that they should know and be willing to share.



**We really appreciate caloric information, especially on a *treat* label.**

sodium nitrate (used for dual purposes, preservative and coloring), and calcium propionate should be avoided.

■ **Artificial colors.** Color is added to dog treats to appeal to *you*; your dog doesn't care what color the treat is! You aren't going to eat these treats, are you? So don't buy treats that contain these unnecessary (and many believe unhealthy) chemicals.

■ **Chemical humectants, such as propylene glycol.** These are used in some pet (and human!) foods to keep them moist and chewy, and to prevent discoloration in preserved meats. There are more natural, food-sourced humectants available, such as vegetable glycerin and molasses.

Speaking of glycerin: If it's not identified as "vegetable glycerin" (a food-sourced product), it's likely to be a petrochemical product – not good.

### Other admirable traits

There are many other factors that we consider when buying treats, but these don't quite rise to the level of make-it-or-break-it selection criteria. However, they are attributes we appreciate for their benefits

to our dogs, all dogs, and the planet we all share.

■ We like to see products with recycled (and/or recyclable) and minimal packaging.

■ We seek out treats that are either small, or easy to break into small pieces. When you use a lot of treats for training, they should be small, so you don't ruin your dog's diet.

■ We admire companies that simply list the ingredients in their products, without splashing the ingredients they *don't* contain all over the label, as in, "No soy, wheat, or corn!" Many dogs do just fine with soy, wheat, corn, and other ingredients that some food makers try to marginalize. (Please consider that there *is* a difference between a label that boasts, "No artificial colors or preservatives!" and one that says, "No corn!")

■ On a related note, we get aggravated every time we see a label claim that a treat is "hypoallergenic" or "contains no allergens." *Any* food ingredient can be an

allergen; there are dogs who are allergic to eggs, chicken, beef, fish, pork, lamb, rice, barley, quinoa, and any other food you can name – foods that are perfectly appropriate for most dogs.

■ We appreciate companies that donate a percentage of their sales to dog-related charities.

### Our list of approved treats

Starting on page 14, we've listed a number of companies that make treats that meet all of our selection criteria. Be aware that we do *not* rate or rank-order the treats we have highlighted as examples of good products. A treat either meets our selection criteria (as outlined above) or it does not; **there is no "top pick" or "best on the list."** We suggest that you try a variety of products, and keep track of which types your dog likes best and which don't agree with him (so you can avoid them in the future).

Don't fret if *your* top pick is not on our list; if it meets our selection criteria, it's as good as anything we've highlighted on the following pages. Happily, there are many more good products on the market than we could ever list.



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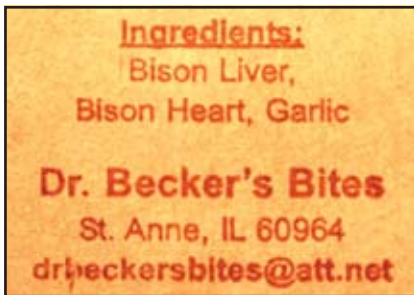


## MEATY TREATS

The most obvious characteristic of a meaty treat is its **high animal protein content**. Animal muscle and organ meat ingredients are much more expensive than grain- or vegetable-based products, so meaty treats will generally cost more than other types of treats.

Products may be quite dry (with a moisture content around 5 percent); or chewy, with as much moisture as 25 percent. The moist products will necessarily contain ingredients known as “humectants” – substances that promote the retention of moisture in the product. The low-moisture treats may be dried, freeze-dried, or dehydrated.

**In general, the fewer ingredients used in these products, the better.**



**Ingredients:** 100% human grade chicken muscle meat, cider vinegar, herbs and spices.

**INGREDIENTS:** Chicken (ground with bone), chicken liver, chicken gizzard, natural tocopherols.

## TRAITS OF A GOOD TREAT

Meaty products should contain as much animal protein as possible! **The animal product should be first on the list of ingredients** and there should be few (or even no) other ingredients. **The source of any animal protein or fat must be named** – chicken, beef, buffalo, whatever. When organ meats or an animal fat is on the label, the species it is from should appear, as well (i.e., beef liver, duck heart, chicken fat). Organic or grass-fed and grass-finished meats are ideal.

All grain, fruit, or vegetable ingredients should be whole, whether used dry or fresh.

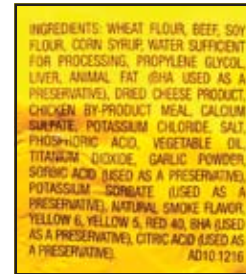
High-moisture products should contain **natural humectants**, such as vegetable glycerin or molasses.



Preservatives, if used, should be **natural**, such as mixed tocopherols. If the product contains no preservatives, the package should contain either a “best by” date or a “manufactured on” date. Unpreserved treats should be stored in a cool, dry place and used promptly after opening.

## TREAT TRAITS TO AVOID

**No animal by-products or unnamed animal sources** (i.e., meat and bone meal, chicken by-products, “animal fat”).



Treats should contain **no artificial colors, flavors, or preservatives**.

**Low-quality grain by-products should also be avoided;** if the label does not simply say the name of a grain or grain flour, it's a by-product.

**Artificial humectants** (such as propylene glycol or glycerin that is not specified as vegetable glycerin, which is likely to be from a petrochemical source) should be avoided.

**Imported ingredients should be avoided.** These products will be fed lightly, not used as a primary source of nutrition, so quality – not cost – should be a primary selection criterion. There are products whose makers swear by the quality of their imported ingredients; we have more faith in U.S. growers. Plus, it's a needless waste of energy to ship a product that is common in the U.S. (such as chicken) halfway around the world.

## COOKIE OR BISCUIT-STYLE TREATS

In general, cookie- or biscuit-style treats are **made with grain or another carbohydrate and baked**. That said, this is a wide category of treats, and there are many grain-free products on the market.

Some biscuits use animal products (such as muscle meat, organ meat, fat, dairy products) as the principle palatant (ingredient used to appeal to dogs), but others use sweeteners or salt.

**Ingredients:** Organic rye flour, organic roasted sweet potato, organic canola oil, organic whole eggs, organic turmeric, organic cumin, organic cinnamon.

This style of product generally has the same range of moisture content found in dry dog foods – about 10 to 12 percent.

**In general, the fewer number of least-processed ingredients used in these products, the better.**

## TRAITS OF A GOOD TREAT

**The source of any animal protein or fat must be named.**

All grain, fruit, or vegetable ingredients should be whole.

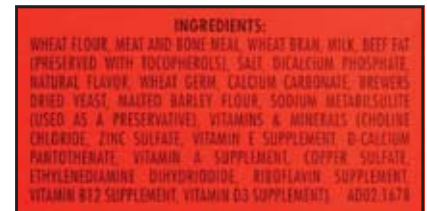
Organic ingredients are ideal. Look for products that use local sources of ingredients.

If preserved, the agent should be a **natural preservative**.

A “best by” date or date of manufacture should be on the package.

## TREAT TRAITS TO AVOID

**No animal by-products or unnamed animal sources** (i.e., meat and bone meal, chicken by-products, “animal fat”).



**Low-quality grain by-products should also be avoided;** if the label does not simply say the name of a grain or grain flour, it's a by-product.

Treats should contain **no artificial colors, flavors, or preservatives**.

**Imported ingredients should be avoided.**

## Some Examples of Top-Quality Meaty Treats

Meaty treats vary quite a bit in consistency, since some are dried, and others are dehydrated or baked. Also, some contain only meat; others contain grains or other carbohydrates on the ingredients list (below the meat ingredients).



### BELLYRUBS DOG TREATS

Meyer Country Farms, Scottsdale, AZ  
(480) 614-1869  
meyercountryfarms.com

### CANINE CAVIAR

Canine Caviar Pet Foods, Inc.,  
Costa Mesa, CA  
(800) 392-7898  
caninecaviar.com

### CARNIVORE CRUNCH

Stella & Chewy's, Muskego, WI  
(888) 477-8977  
stellaandchewys.com



### DR. BECKER'S BITES

Dr. Becker's Bites, St. Anne, IL  
Sorry, no phone number available  
drbeckersbites.com

### ETTA SAYS! MEATY TREATS

Etta Says!, Seattle, WA  
(866) 439-3882  
ettasays.com

### GRIZZLY NUTREATS

Grizzly Pet Products, LLC, Kirkland, WA  
(888) 323-5575  
grizzlypetproducts.com



### LIV-A-LITTLES

Halo Purely for Pets, Tampa, FL  
(800) 426-4256  
halopets.com

### MEATY BITES

Addiction Foods, NZ Limited, Te Puke, New Zealand  
(U.S. distributor is Evergreen Pet Supply, 800-959-3395)  
addictionfoods.com

### NOTHING BUT NATURAL

Evanger's Dog & Cat Food Co., Inc, Wheeling, IL  
(800) 288-6796  
evangersdogfood.com

### NOTHING BUT . . . TREATS

A Place for Paws, Columbiana, OH  
(800) 354-4216  
aplaceforpaws.com

### PRIMAL DRY ROASTED TREATS

Primal Pet Foods, Inc, San Mateo, CA  
(866) 566-4652  
primalpetfoods.com

### REAL FOOD TOPPERS

Complete Natural Nutrition, Marshalltown, IA  
(866) 807-7335  
realfoodtoppers.com

### ROSIE'S REWARDS

Rosebud, Inc., Pray, MT  
(877) 767-3283  
rosiesrewards.com

### WAGGERS CHAMPION CHIPS

Pet Central, Sylvania, OH  
(888) 892-7393  
waggers.com

### WELLNESS PURE REWARDS AND WELLNESS WELLBITES

Wellpet, LLC, Inc., Tewksbury, MA  
(800) 225-0904  
wellpet.com

### WHOLE LIFE PET TREATS

Whole Life Pet Products, Pittsfield, MA  
(877) 210-3142  
wholelifepet.com

### ZIWIPEAK GOOD DOG TREATS

Ziwipeak Ltd., North Island, New Zealand  
(877) 464-9494  
ziwipeak.com

### ZUKE'S TREATS FOR DOGS

Zuke's, Durango, CO  
(866) 985-3364  
zukes.com

## Another Sort of Treat

These two treats are not meat-based – but they are not cookies, either! Both contain a single-ingredient: Dried sweet potato.

### DR-CHEW SWEET POTATO TREATS

Landy Corporation, Federal Way, WA  
(253) 835-1427  
dr-chew.com

### SAM'S YAMS

Front Porch Pets, Inc.  
Henderson, NV  
(800) 922-2968  
frontporchpets.com





## Some Examples of Top-Quality Cookie-Type Treats

Cookie- or biscuit-style treats tend to have a more consistent texture, thanks to their baked carbohydrate content. But because the dough can be rolled and cut out, bakers can design an unlimited number and variety of creative shapes and sizes. As cute as the larger cookies are, we strongly prefer small treats – or at least cookies that can easily be broken into bits.

**BARKSTIX**  
Bark Stix, Pt. Richmond, CA  
(510) 235-2430  
barkstix.com

**BUDDY BISCUITS, MUTTOS, PROVENANCE, TRAILHOUND**  
Cloud Star Corporation, San Luis Obispo, CA  
(800) 361-9079  
cloudstar.com

**CHARLEE BEAR DOG TREATS**  
Charlee Bear Farms, Inc., Madison, WI  
(800) 880-2327  
charleebear.com

**FRUITABLES**  
Vetscience, LLC, Dallas, TX  
(214) 800-2321  
fruitablespetfood.com

**GRANDMA LUCY'S DOG TREATS**  
Grandma Lucy's, Irvine, CA  
(800) 906-5829  
grandmalucys.com

**HEIDI'S HOMEMADE DOG TREATS**  
Heidi's Homemade Dog Treats, Columbus, OH  
(877) 738-7622  
heidisbakery.com

**HENRY & SONS VEGETARIAN COOKIES**  
Henry & Sons, San Jose, CA  
(877) 473-7637  
henryandsons.com

**HOWLIN' GOURMET**  
Dancing Paws Bakery, Tustin, CA  
(888) 644-7297  
dancingpaws.com

**LAUGHING DOG NUTRITION BARS**  
Laughing Dog Inc., Ventura, CA  
(209) 367-1800  
laughingdoginc.com

**LIVER BISCOTTI**  
Premier Pet Products, Midlothian, VA  
(800) 795-5930  
liverbiscotti.com

**MA SNAX SUPERIOR TREATS**  
Ma Snax, Sonoma, CA  
(707) 939-8174  
masnax.com

**MOTHER NATURE NATURAL DOG BISCUITS**  
Natura Pet Products, Santa Clara, CA  
(800) 532-7261  
naturapet.com



**NEWMAN'S OWN PREMIUM DOG TREATS**  
Newman's Own Organics, Aptos, CA  
(800) 865-2866  
newmansownorganics.com

**PAWS GOURMET**  
Paws Gourmet, Inc, Marysville, WA  
(866) 231-7297  
pawsgourmet.com

**POLITICAL DOG BISCUITS**  
Capitol Dog Bakery, Falls Church, VA  
(703) 532-7387  
capitoldogbakery.com

**SMOOCHES, NUZZLES, and PECKS**  
The Honest Kitchen, San Diego, CA  
(866) 437-9729  
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# Dancing With Dogs

*Don't fret; you don't actually have to dance to enjoy this sport!*

BY TERRY LONG

**S**napping fingers and tapping feet are the signature moves of musical freestyle – and that's the audience! What happens between dog and handler during a musical freestyle performance is simply magical. The handler gives subtle cues, and her dog executes complicated maneuvers, one after the other, as the pair moves across the floor, their routine choreographed to music that emphasizes their connection.

For those of you whose introduction to this sport was watching a widely distributed video clip of Carolyn Scott's routine to "Grease" with her Golden Retriever, Rookie, you were probably awestruck. You may have even gotten a little misty eyed, recognizing the commitment, training, and connection between two different species. But it was the look on Rookie's face that sold you that this was a sport worth exploring. This dog was having a blast, and the behaviors he was doing were

difficult! How could training something so hard be so fun?

"I first saw freestyle in 1997, a video of Donna Duford and her PBGV (Petit Basset Griffon Vendéen)," recalls freestyle judge and instructor Julie Flanery. "In 1998 I saw it live for the first time at a demonstration at an APDT (Association of Pet Dog Trainers) conference. I was amazed at what these dogs were doing and how much fun it looked. I had to do this with my dog!"

Flanery has since become one of the sport's most ardent boosters, convincing many people to give this sport a try even in the sport's early days in her area of the Pacific Northwest. "Most of my early freestyle training was on my own by watching others and then figuring out how to train it using positive reinforcement methods. I had to do a lot of problem solving early on and came up with several of my own methods. I also took several workshops, sometimes traveling great distances to learn from top performers."

Flanery added freestyle to the list of classes she was teaching at the time, cajoling several of her students to give it a try. "That small group of six friends created the first freestyle club on the West Coast, Dogs Gone Dancin,' now with almost 50 members in Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia."

Since then, Flanery has stayed so active in the sport that she has been invited to present workshops in South Africa, has presented numerous workshops in the U.S., has become a judge for the World Canine Freestyle Organization (WCFO), and, of course, put advanced freestyle titles on her own dogs. All from just watching that one demonstration. Watch out; this sport can be addictive!

## The game

There are two major styles of dog dancing, as this sport is also known. One is heelwork to music, or canine dressage, which focuses on setting precise heelwork (in close to



PHOTO BY BRENDA CUTTING, RAINBOW RIVER PHOTOGRAPHY, LLC

**Julie and Chili make musical freestyle look easy – and above all, fun! But it takes a lot of practice to create an effortless-looking performance!**

proximity to the handler) to music. Musical freestyle, on the other hand, allows any movement or combination of movements, in close proximity or at a distance, as long as the movements are safe for the dog.

Music is chosen based on a dog's gait, with faster tempos for the quick-moving dogs and a more moderate beat for dogs that naturally move slower or are larger in structure. Handlers memorize the music, break it down into segments, choreograph movements for themselves and their dogs, and then string it all together. The result can be breathtaking, hilarious, dramatic, or a combination of all three.

If you have never seen a freestyle routine, you might want to power up your computer, go to YouTube.com, and type "canine musical freestyle" in the "search" field. You'll find a wide variety of clips. Carolyn Scott's "Grease" routine has had



PHOTO BY BRENDA CUTTING, RAINBOW RIVER PHOTOGRAPHY, LLC

**Julie Flanery, of Philomath, Oregon, is a musical freestyle instructor, competitor, and judge. She is shown performing with her 14-year-old Lab-mix, Chili.**



more than 5 million viewers. Look at a few of the “most viewed” clips and you’ll see why this sport is so fun and challenging.

At its core, musical freestyle is the art of training individual tricks such as spin, twist, back up, leg weaves, circling around the handler, side stepping, etc., and then training your dog to do multiple tricks in a row while you move around at the same time.

Cindy Mahrt was one of the people Flanery enrolled in one of her classes in 2000. Mahrt attended with her 18-month-old Rottweiler, Gitta.

“I wanted to keep Gitta in some sort of class to keep up her socialization skills,” recalls Mahrt. “Gitta and I had gone through all the normal classes – puppy, beginners, advanced beginners; we even tried a tricks class. When Julie decided to try a freestyle class, she asked if we were interested. It was way more fun than doing basic obedience over and over. A small

group of us tried it one night; it was a little crazy, but fun, and I was hooked.”

Mahrt had never competed in a dog sport before and had no intention of doing so in freestyle. However, Flanery’s enthusiasm was infectious and Gitta just loved the sport. “I swore I would never compete,” says Mahrt. “I just couldn’t see myself going out in public and dancing with my dog in a costume. I wasn’t comfortable with the whole idea of competition. I just wanted to have fun with Gitta and the friends I’d made in class. At that time, there weren’t many opportunities to compete, so it wasn’t much of an issue.”

## History

Freestyle in North America goes back to 1989 when Val Culpin of British Columbia, Canada, started developing the sport. Trainers in England were on a similar path, with top obedience competitor Mary Ray wowing crowds with her demonstrations

at Crufts, the top conformation, obedience, and agility competition event in Britain.

Throughout the 1990s, the sport continued to grow in Canada, the U.S., and Britain. The Canada-based Musical Canine Sports International (MCSI) was launched to write rules and judging guidelines. Its first U.S. competition was held in 1996 in Springfield, Oregon.

Throughout the years, different styles of the sport developed, including heelwork to music and musical freestyle, as well as a distinctly theatrical style with highly costumed competitors and dramatic story lines. Bring up YouTube.com on your computer’s Web browser again and search “Attila and Fly, Gladiator” for an excellent example of this more theatrical style. The sport has continued to evolve throughout the world, and additional organizations have sprung up to support different approaches and philosophies. (See Snapshot of the Sport, below.)

## Snapshot of the Sport: Musical Freestyle

■ **What is this sport?** Handlers choreograph a routine to music, and dog and handler perform the routine together. In “heelwork to music” the routines are performed with dogs in close proximity to the handlers, while in “musical freestyle” the dogs can also perform at a distance and a greater variety of behaviors is allowed.

■ **Prior training required?** Basic pet manners, especially attention, and tricks.

■ **Physical demands?**

On the dog: Moderate to high.

On the handler: Moderate to high.

■ **Best-suited structure?** Routines are customized to fit each dog, so every type of dog is well-suited!

■ **Best-suited temperament?** Suitable for low- and high-energy dogs alike.

■ **Cost?** Low.

■ **Training complexity?** Moderate to very complex.

■ **Mental stimulation?** Moderate to very high.

■ **Physical stimulation?** Moderate to high.

■ **Recreational opportunities?** Low.

■ **Competition opportunities and venues?** Moderate.

■ **For further information on musical freestyle:**

Some of these organizations offer members online workshops, instructor classes, and forums; and also recommend books and videos.

**World Canine Freestyle Organization (WCFO)**  
(718) 332-8336; [worldcaninefreestyle.org](http://worldcaninefreestyle.org)

**Canine Freestyle Federation (FCC)**  
No phone available; [canine-freestyle.org](http://canine-freestyle.org)

**Paws 2 Dance (P2D)**  
No phone available.  
[bcfirst.com/paws](http://bcfirst.com/paws)

**Musical Dog Sports Association (MDSA)** No phone available.  
[musicaldogsport.org](http://musicaldogsport.org)

**Online freestyle course**  
[kpct.coursehost.com](http://kpct.coursehost.com)

**Julie Flanery, Wonder Dogs**  
Philomath, OR  
(541) 929-3915  
[wonderdogsonline.com](http://wonderdogsonline.com)

**Michele Pouliot**  
Oregon City, OR  
(503) 657-3385  
[cdf-freestyle.com](http://cdf-freestyle.com)



**Cindy Mahrt and her 11-year-old Rottweiler, Gitta, have largely “danced away” Gitta’s anxiety around other dogs.**

PHOTO BY BRENDA CUTTING, RAINBOW RIVER PHOTOGRAPHY, LLC

## Attributes of dancing dogs and handlers

A wide variety of breeds and mixes participate in this sport. Freestyle training is great for fearful dogs, too, since only one dog competes at a time, and the training culture in freestyle is one of using positive reinforcement methods.

Positive methods help build dogs' confidence and trust, and this was an attraction for Mahrt when she decided to try freestyle. "Gitta really responded well to positive reinforcement training. When we first started [obedience] classes, it was mostly positive, but switched back to traditional methods when any problems arose. This just didn't work with Gitta; it only made things worse. It was wonderful to start freestyle and switch to only positive reinforcement. We do a lot with clicker training and shaping."

Flanery believes that freestyle appeals to many kinds of people, but especially "those who enjoy music, enjoy the teamwork between dog and handler, who seek a creative outlet for themselves and their dogs, and who are willing to step outside of their current skill set and learn new things, such as music editing, choreography, and presentation."

## Equipment & supplies

Although some trainers use some props in their routines (e.g., a cane, a stool, a handkerchief), all that is required is you and your dog. With the exception of the more theatrical routines, costumes are not essential although most people dress in a manner that supports their routine. For example, a team performing to country music might wear a western-themed shirt and jeans.

You will need a boom box or other music player to play your music, and it is helpful to have one that is easy to pause, rewind, and find your place again. A remote control can be helpful for this.

Handlers use pen and paper and sometimes rally obedience signs and software to map out their choreography. Otherwise, standard training supplies (clicker and treats) are all you need.

## Expenses

This is a relatively inexpensive sport. Gas and lodging will probably be your biggest expense if you intend to compete in person.

If you can find a class in your area, they are typically similar in cost to basic

pet manners classes. An alternative to a freestyle class is to enroll in a tricks class to build your repertoire of behaviors.

Competition fees run about \$30 per class per event. Live competitions are still far and few between so you might compete only once or twice a year, and video competitions are only scheduled a few times a year as well. Membership in one of the sponsoring organizations varies. For example, an annual membership in the WCFO is \$30.

## Training

This is a deceptively difficult sport. It looks like so much fun that one forgets that each behavior must be trained to mastery before putting them together in a routine.

Professional trainers like to say, "A behavior chain is only as strong as its weakest link." If one of your behaviors, e.g., leg weaves, falls apart in the middle of a routine, it can be difficult to get the routine back on track.

Flanery points out, "As freestyle competitors we are asking our dogs to perform anywhere from 30 to 80 (or more!) cued behaviors in a span of a minute and a half to four minutes depending on the level entered . . . there is a lot of multi-tasking that goes on in the freestyle ring. Both the dog and the handler are working hard. The dog, attentive, following cues and performing with as much precision as possible, always ready for the next cue; the handler, listening to the music cues, cueing the dog's moves, keeping her choreography straight, and readjusting for missed moves or cues."

The prerequisite behaviors that set teams up for success are those brought from basic pet manners: attention, sit, stay, down, and heel (walk in position next to you). Of these, attention and heel in position are the most important. While polishing those basic skills, you can also be training a variety of tricks, the foundation of what you see in a freestyle routine.

Most important for handlers who want to excel in freestyle is a solid understanding and hands-on experience with positive reinforcement and, in particular, clicker training. The clicker excels as a "behavior marker," quickly and accurately (in the hands of a skilled trainer) identifying the smallest pieces of a full behavior that might be difficult to get with other methods.

For example, imagine that you want to train your dog to lift a front foot off the floor and hold it in space for two seconds.

It might be difficult to lure that behavior (using a treat to move your dog in the direction you want). With the clicker and good observation skills, you can click for the slightest shift of weight. Dogs that have been clicker trained understand that the click happened for something very specific and they soon figure out what it is. The art of "shaping" behavior this way also makes it easier to motivate your dog to work with you even if you don't have a treat in front of her nose.

Flanery has used a combination of luring and clicker training to train many of the creative and complex behaviors she has taught over the years. "While there are freestylers who don't use a clicker, I believe strongly that to get to the upper levels of creativity, a dog and handler team should focus on building solid clicker skills and an understanding of operant conditioning. It is often the dog who comes up with the most creative behaviors, and if you don't understand how to draw that out of your dog, then you are missing out on one of the most amazing aspects of freestyle."

Training freestyle, even if you choose not to compete, has additional benefits. As with many dog sports, an amazing connection between human and dog blossoms through the training process. This is especially true for dogs with behavior issues or physical challenges. Cindy Mahrt's Rottie, Gitta, had both. Now 11 years young, Gitta's freestyle training was interrupted in 2003 when she underwent anterior cruciate ligament knee surgery at age five and then a year later for the other knee. She had also always been a bit fearful, and being out of commission for almost two years for her surgeries and recovery was a set back for Mahrt who had worked so hard to train and socialize her dog.

"We suddenly were very restricted in what she could do for those couple of years. Freestyle is a great sport for building up muscle tone. Dogs do a lot of rear work – backing up, side passes, circling around backward, backward weaves, etc. All of these take an awareness of their rear ends that most dogs don't have. I think it really helped her recovery.

"Being sidelined by two surgeries kept her pretty isolated for awhile. Gitta is very reactive to dogs she doesn't know. Freestyle got me working with clicker training and positive reinforcement. They are very useful and important tools in dealing with a reactive dog. Giving her something else to focus on is also important. If a new dog

comes into class, I can have her do spins, circles, weaves, etc., and get a big treat; she forgets all about the other dog. Pretty soon that dog isn't so scary anymore."

## Levels of competition

Each organization has its own rules for heelwork to music and musical freestyle. Judging takes into consideration creativity, variety, and audience appeal. Specifics such as how much floor space must be covered in a particular level or division will be covered and guidelines provided that help handlers decide the number of behaviors they want to showcase in a given performance.

Both WCFO and MDSA have a system for handlers to submit videotape of their performance for judging, so you can "compete" without having to always travel long distances.

What if you don't want to compete? Many people start out thinking that competition is not their cup of tea. Mahrt remembers her own reluctance to compete. "Then I figured I could at least try it, once, but without a costume. I guess you can see where this is going," Mahrt says wryly.

"Although I don't have a fancy costume – I usually wear nice black trousers and a velvety black shirt – I do now compete. I think it was 2001 that we had our first competition in Washington. We did pretty well; that was our first beginner's leg. It took a long time after that to get the next leg and move up the ladder. The surgeries and stage fright – hers, not mine (well, a little mine) – slowed us down for a while.

"We compete through WCFO in live competitions. We got our Beginner and Novice titles. It then became obvious that physically she could not compete any longer in the regular divisions. WCFO is a great organization for its inclusion of everyone. I'm happy to say that Gitta and I earned our Championship title in the Handi Dandi division last May. We are now going to start over in the Sassy Senior division, for dogs older than nine years."

## How to get started

Contact one of the sponsoring organizations to find out if there are any instructors or member clubs in your area. If there aren't, do what Julie Flanery did. Watch some videos, get inspired, and share your

enthusiasm with your friends. Many freestyle groups start when friends meet at a park and train together, sharing music, tricks, and choreography tips. Find a local clicker trainer or training facility that uses positive reinforcement and, if they don't offer freestyle, convince them to bring someone in to present a seminar to get you started.

## Is this sport for you?

There are many aspects of freestyle that may appeal to you: the fun in just spending time with your dog, the challenges of competition, or sharing your routines with nursing home residents through therapy dog visits or doing public demonstrations. This is truly a sport that, at its core, expresses the deep potential within the human-canine bond.

Now, go grab those dancing shoes! 🐾

*Terry Long, CPDT, is a writer, agility instructor, and behavior counselor in Long Beach, CA. She lives with four dogs and a cat and is addicted to agility and animal behavior. See "Resources," page 24, for contact information.*

## "I'm Planning to Dance 'Til I Die!"

Franzi Corman has always had dogs. As a teenager and young adult, she tried competition obedience, but quit when she didn't enjoy the traditional training methods of the time. After her kids left the nest, she moved to Oregon and for 22 years raised and showed Norfolk terriers.

Uh-oh; Oregon is where Julie Flanery is. It was just a matter of time. Three years ago, the unsuspecting Corman – at the age of 71 – was talked into going to a freestyle workshop presented by Flanery. She went just to appease her friend. She took one of her Norfolk Terriers.

As Corman recalls, "The workshop started at 9 a.m., and at noon I called my family and best friends and said, 'This is what I'm doing for the rest of my life!' I've always loved dancing, but ran out of men to dance with a while ago. This was a way of combining my passions."

Corman adopted a three-year-old Australian Shepherd, Keeper, shortly after discovering freestyle and started taking classes. A year later, invigorated by the sport and having so much fun, Corman brought home an Aussie pup, Rain. Competing in the sport seemed a natural progression. "I know from dog breeding that competing creates the challenge to strive. I am not really very competitive. My goal is to develop my relationship with my dogs, and I want us to do the best we can do. It's not about titles."

That said, Corman, now 74, has two freestyle titles with Keeper, and is readying Rain for competition as well.

Asked what freestyle has done for her personally, Corman is quick to explain. "The unbelievable joy it has brought into my life. The wonderful fun I have with the dogs, the truly amazing and generous people who are in this sport, and the friends I've made. I'm planning to dance 'til I die!"



**Franzi Corman and Rain, one of her two "dancing" Australian Shepherds.**

PHOTO BY BRENDA CUTTING, RAINBOW RIVER PHOTOGRAPHY, LLC



## Beyond Freestyle

Many people who see freestyle for the first time have never participated in a dog sport before. Enthused by what they see, they try training a few tricks, set their routine to music, and have a great time with their dogs. Freestyle is a great introduction to dog sports.

Then there are people like Michele Pouliot: Eighteen years of competition obedience resulting in three OTCHs (obedience trial champion) on her own dogs, numerous CD, CDX, and UD obedience titles for her clients' dogs, including a Great Dane she qualified for the Gaines Obedience Championships; several years competing in agility, and 35 years as a full-time trainer for Guide Dogs for the Blind, with more than 350 guide dogs blossoming under her tutelage. Currently the director of research and training for Guide Dogs for the Blind, Pouliot is also on the faculty of Karen Pryor's Clicker Expo and partnered with Karen Pryor to create an online freestyle course. Oh, and then there is the horse hobby of carriage driving that she pursued after she moved from California to Oregon.

It was during the years working with horses that she honed her clicker training skills and discovered the power of this training technology when she taught her miniature horses to retrieve a ball in just a couple of days' training. Then in 2005, she saw Attila Skukalek's Charlie Chaplin theatrical freestyle routine with his Border Collie, Fly.

Pouliot realized three things: a) the difficulty and entertainment value of the sport really appealed to her; b) clicker training was a natural choice for the precision training she knew she'd want; and c) she didn't actually have to dance.

"All my involvement with dog sports is to have fun with my dogs and communicate better with them. I am the type of person who likes a goal to strive for when training and competition provides me with clear goals. I have always loved to compete with my dogs but freestyle is a very different type of competing. You are not just competing; you are entertaining an audience and creating something quite special between yourself and your dog. I love conveying something to the audience with my dog as my partner."

Pouliot's efforts over the years to hone her clicker training skills paid off exceptionally well: She could easily shape many of the creative moves she wanted, her dog absolutely loved training, and she was able to fix problems much easier than with training techniques she had used 20 years ago.

"Freestyle and clicker training is a match made in heaven. In freestyle you desire dozens of fun and impressive trick behaviors, precision, and enthusiasm to perform from the dog. Clicker training can give all of this, as long as the techniques are applied effectively. I say this because there is a lot of so called "clicker training" that is truly not using the power in these techniques. Just using a clicker does not make a clicker trainer."



**Michele Pouliot and six-year-old Listo performing their "Hotel California" routine.**



Then, one day, she had an epiphany: Why couldn't clicker training be just as effective in training "serious" dog behaviors. Like leading the blind. There it was, right in front of her. She had just been appointed to a new position with Guide Dogs for the Blind and was now responsible for seeking out ways to improve programs for client instruction and dog training.

Pouliot knew that clicker training had been used by great trainers since the 1940s to train more than 140 species of animals, as part of top-secret government projects, aquariums, zoos, and commercial ventures. But she also knew that, historically, the dog training community has been highly resistant to moving away from compulsive training techniques. Since 1920, when dogs were first trained to be guides for the blind, their trainers had been staunch advocates of compulsive training methods.

But why not give clicker training a try? Her belief in the method was strong. She had experience and titles from her years using traditional training – and thus the credibility – to speak intelligently to people who had not yet discovered other methods. If she could just enthuse them as she had become enthused over the years – and show them results – she knew their training programs would blossom.

It worked. It didn't happen overnight. But it worked.

"Introducing clicker training to an established training program was a challenge and took several years to prepare such a large staff, located over two campuses, to make such a dramatic change. Our school has become a mentor now to dozens of other guide dog schools around the world in the adoption of clicker training in their programs. It is very exciting to see the positive changes in our program, but also rewarding to see the impact our success is having on other schools that would never have considered making such dramatic changes."

Being a change agent is hard work. And although Pouliot is proud of her legacy with Guide Dogs for the Blind, what she finds most personal satisfaction from is what freestyle brought her. Mining a newfound creativity she didn't know she possessed and a bond with her dogs that was stronger than any other dog sport she had tried.

"The routines you and your dog 'create' together become very meaningful memories you will always have to watch again and again. This has become very apparent to me now, as I have just had to retire Cabo due to his progressive deafness. I am saddened that this beautiful dog will not be able to perform another freestyle routine, but he and I together have created memories I will always cherish, now and when he is gone.

"I may have hundreds of hours of videotape of my obedience and agility competitions over the years. Do I ever sit down and look at them? Rarely, if ever. My past freestyle performances I seem to watch and enjoy several times a year. They are different: These routines are 'creations' that my dogs and I made together. What a great feeling!"

# How WDJ Helps

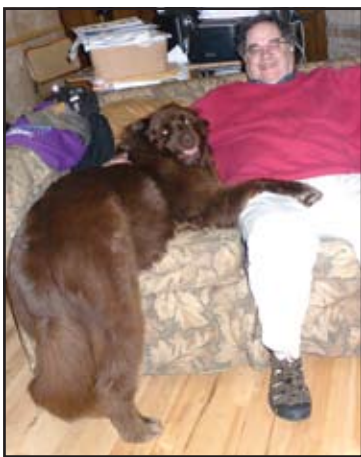
*Health, behavior, and adoption tips for motivated owners.*

Please remember to mention rescue groups for people looking for specific breeds. We love Newfoundlands, and are celebrating the one-year anniversary of our adoption of Terra, a brown Newfie we rescued.

Terra was very stressed by the move and I wasn't really planning on preparing another BARF (bones and raw food) diet. She doesn't like kibble, though, so here we are again. BARF diets are a little hard to get started, but once you get a system, they're not bad. The hardest thing for me is getting enough fresh chicken necks, since my usual grocery store doesn't stock them, so I have to make a special trip to a different store, but I think it's a lot cheaper than buying the prepared meat meals.

I started receiving WDJ when we had our first Newf. We got her as a pup and she soon became infected somehow with

chronic *Staph* after her spaying or another operation. It was awful! Could you imagine bathing a Newfoundland with two different antiseptic shampoos every other week?



**Her owner calls this Terra's "I'm not really on the couch" pose.**

Being a holistic health nut myself, I just couldn't see having to give her antibiotics for the rest of her life. That's where your publication came in. I read WDJ's articles about BARF diets, and after more research, gradually switched her over to BARF when she was two or three years old. The *Staph* went away completely, never to be seen again!

She did have problems with arthritis, even on the great diet. We tried chiropractic and acupuncture, and were finally able to manage the arthritis with Adequan injections. She lived to be almost 12.

Also, I wanted to write last winter and tell your readers how difficult it is to adopt a dog in winter in a cold climate. Here I was with my treat bag, bundled to the hilt, having to remove my mittens to reward this enormous dog who had never been trained to do anything (!) for nice walking! We had much fun, though, using Pat Miller's "run away" technique for training a dog to come to you. Terra invented her own variation: She would run several yards in front of me on the snowy path, and then turn around and look at me, wait for my signal and run back to get her treat. I wait for Pat's articles every month!

Laurie Pevnick  
Glendale, WI

*In my editorial last month, I mentioned rescue groups and local shelters as ideal sources for dog adoptions. However, please see this month's editorial (page 2) for information on how to determine whether a rescue group is legitimate. Increasingly, we read reports of so-called rescue groups that are hoarding animals, or worst of all, failing to properly care for them while profiting on their sale. – Editor*

## Owner-Aggressive Dogs Sought for Thyroid Study

Treating hypothyroidism as a way to improve behavioral health dates back to the 1940s, when psychiatrists first noted this correlation in their human patients. More recently, Drs. Nicholas Dodman and Linda Aronson, of Tufts Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine (TCSVM) began treating dogs with behavior problems for low (or borderline-low) thyroid levels and noting an improvement in a variety of behavior problems involving fear, anxiety, and aggression.

While such reports of behavioral improvement are helpful, more conclusive evidence is necessary to validate the therapeutic efficacy of thyroid replacement therapy in the treatment of canine behavior problems. To address this need, researchers at TCSVM are currently enrolling dogs that demonstrate *owner-directed* aggression and have concurrent low or borderline low thyroid levels into an eight-week clinical trial.

If you own a dog that growls, lifts a lip, snaps at, or

otherwise "bites the hand that feeds," on a daily or near-daily basis, please contact Nicole Cottam, Animal Behavior Service Coordinator for Tufts, at (508) 887-4802 or [nicole.cottam@tufts.edu](mailto:nicole.cottam@tufts.edu) for enrollment information. A visit to TCSVM is not necessary if your local veterinarian is willing to assist.

Owners of behaviorally qualified dogs will receive a free thyroid test. All thyroid testing is completed via Dr. Jean Dodds at Hemopet/Hemolife Laboratory in California. Once enrolled, owners will be required to count and record the number of family-directed aggressive episodes, on a daily basis, for two months. Behavioral advice can be provided to non-responders. Dogs currently on thyroid treatment are not eligible to enroll.

**Note:** Dogs will be randomly assigned to either a treatment or a placebo group. Dogs that receive placebo will not start thyroid treatment until the end of the eight-week clinical trial.

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## RESOURCES

### BOOKS

WDJ Training Editor Pat Miller is author of *The Power of Positive Dog Training*; *Positive Perspectives: Love Your Dog, Train Your Dog*; *Positive Perspectives II: Know Your Dog, Train Your Dog*; and *Play with Your Dog*. All of these books are available from DogWise, (800) 776-2665 or dogwise.com



### TRAINING AND INSTRUCTION

**Terry Long**, CPDT, DogPACT, Long Beach, CA. Terry is a writer, agility instructor, and behavior counselor. She provides pre-adoption counseling, behavior modification, and group classes in pet manners and agility. (562) 423-0793; dogpact.com

**Pat Miller**, CPDT, Peaceable Paws Dog and Puppy Training, Hagerstown, MD. Train with modern, dog-friendly positive methods. Group and private training, rally, behavior modification, workshops, intern and apprentice programs. (301) 582-9420; peaceablepaws.com

**Sandi Thompson**, CPDT, BRAVO!PUP Puppy and Dog Training, Berkeley, CA. Private lessons, group classes. (510) 704-8656; bravopup.com

### HOLISTIC VETERINARIANS

**American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association** (AHVMA), 2214 Old Emmorton Road, Bel Air, MD 21015. (410) 569-0795. Send a self-addressed, stamped envelope for a list of holistic vets in your area, or search ahvma.org

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*How to identify a "top quality herbal supplement."*

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### What is Holistic Medicine, Anyway?

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### Gear of the Year

*The best dog care and training gear we've seen all year!*

### Update on CAT

*Many positive trainers are trying Constructional Aggression Treatment (CAT) with their toughest aggression cases. Here's a report on how well the tactic is working in real-world trials.*