STARTING SCENT WORK WITH YOUR PUPPY

Scent Work is a positive, challenging activity that allows dogs the opportunity to use their strongest natural sense in a way that's fun, engaging, and that builds and strengthens a foundation of trust between the handler and dog. It is a wonderful activity for high energy or intelligent dogs who need to use their brains and will enjoy the challenge.

We humans don't see the world in "smell" the same way that our dogs do, so we don't always appreciate how important the sense of smell is to our dogs. For that reason, we miss an entire way to interact with and stimulate them. The part of the dog's brain that analyses smells is 40 times larger than a human nose. If you compare our measly 5 million scent receptors to a Bloodhound's 300 million, you can see that our noses are pretty pathetic in comparison!

Starting Scent work with food treats (Your puppy may work harder if a bit hungry!)
Show your dog that you have a piece of food/treat in your hand.
Say 'find it!' and then throw the piece of food/treat across the floor.
When your dog finds the piece of food, say a clear 'yes!' so they know they've followed through on the action that you wanted from them.

Find the Treats
Treats are a good place to start scent training your puppy. This is another easy game where you hide treats around a room for the dog to hunt out with their nose. Once again, start with obviously placed ones, but then begin to hide them under a sheet of newspaper, or a plastic plant pot, in an old cardboard toilet roll, under a towel – the choices are endless! Get creative but don't hide them on sofas or chairs unless you want your dog tunnelling around in your furniture. It's best kept purely at ground level altogether for chewy dogs or house-proud owners.

Puppy Smelling
Leave a trail of treats that lead to a tasty treat like a stuffed Kong toy, which can be hidden somewhere more challenging like in a handle-less bucket. Just always make sure everything you do is safe and supervised. You should offer encouragement to your puppy too, make it a nose work game you do together.

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Snuffle Mats

You can also do this in the garden using a snuffle mat, or if you are feeling really lazy, you can just scatter a handful of kibble in the grass and leave your dog to sniff them out, as a fun and simple puppy scent training game.

Sniffle mats are great for distracting a puppy from doing something you don't want them to do, or for calming them down.

Hide and Seek

Get someone to hold your puppy, or ask it to wait, and then go and hide somewhere in the house. Don't go too far at the beginning they get the hang of the scent training game. You can leave a trail of kibble or treats to start with to make it easier.

When you are ready, your friend can let go of your puppy, and they can use their nose to follow the trail and discover where you are hiding. When your puppy finds you, give them their favourite treat, or if they are more toy-focused, have a great game. Then you can go somewhere else, where there is no fresh scent of you or the treats, and try again.

Find the Toy

There are lots of variations of this simple nose work exercise that you can play outside in the garden and further afield (with your puppy on a long line if their recall isn't good). One of them is to take your puppy's favourite toy and get them really excited about it, then get someone to hold your puppy so they can't see where you are going. Walk a little way and put the toy down. Remember not to go too far, and don't hide it in too hard a place to start with. Retrace your exact steps back to your puppy so there is only one scent trail and then release, encouraging your puppy to find the toy. When you start with puppy scent training, your dog may be using more than just his nose to find the toy, but as you begin to make it harder and go a little further (always in a new spot), you will see your pup following your scent with their nose – which is always awe-inspiring to watch and great fun to do!

Progressing Scent Work

You can progress all the games by using different environments and hiding in more challenging places. Remember to always finish on a positive – puppies may only manage 5-10 minutes at first. Work out what your puppy likes to find most – a human, a treat or a toy and reward every success.