

PET TALES

Best smeller

Teach your dog how to use his nose for good

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Universal Uclick

Have you ever wished there was a dog sport that anyone — and any dog — could do? Wish no more. Nose work is what you've been looking for. If your dog can eat treats out of a box or has a favorite toy, he can excel at this fun sport. Purebreds and mixed breeds of all ages, sizes and abilities are finding a place in nose work classes and competitions.

The object of the game is for the dog to find a particular odor — birch, anise or clove — and alert his handler to the find by sitting, looking at the person or displaying some other signal. It can be played indoors or outdoors on all types of surfaces. Weather or environmental factors such as wind, rain, snow, air conditioners or heating vents affect the dispersal of scent and the difficulty of the find.

Nose work, which was invented in 2006 by three California dog trainers, isn't just a way for your dog to use his sniffer. It helps shy or fearful dogs learn confidence, strengthens the bond between dog and handler, and permits older dogs to remain active and interested in life.

In this sport, the dog takes the lead. It's his nose that does the work, after all. Both dog and handler must learn to read and respond to the subtleties of each other's body language, and dogs must



The highly developed canine sense of smell makes nose work an ideal sport for any dog.

learn to overcome distractions, handler interference and individual fears, such as shiny floors or tight corners.

For people, it can be difficult to step back and not try to direct the dog. The word "No" is off the table, as are any other corrections and obedience commands. Letting the dog work and believing him when he gives the alert signal is easier said than done, but you'll find that practice enriches communication between you and your dog.

It's essential to reward the dog for finds. That's where treats — or a favorite toy — come in. Dogs start by finding an open box on the floor filled with treats. They get to eat the treats out of the box, plus they get more treats and praise

when they find the container. Even if he needs a little help, the dog is always rewarded for finding a scent.

Gradually, scent is paired with the treats in the box. As the dog progresses, he's eventually searching for scent alone, but he always gets rewarded with treats or a favorite toy and praise when he makes a find. That's a big ego boost for any dog, but it especially benefits dogs with little confidence. It's not unusual to see shy or timid dogs become excited about searches after just a couple of classes.

Got a dog who barks or snarls at his fellow canines? That's not a problem in nose work. Each dog works individually while the others are out of sight in a car or crate. They might see each other in passing, but class members learn quickly which dogs need more space and then work together to accommodate their needs. Even after the dog learns the basics, most people continue to go to class for practice and camaraderie.

Nose work is a game that you can do just for fun, but it also has a competitive element. After passing an Odor Recognition Test (ORT) proving that the dog has the ability to find and recognize a particular odor, dog/handler teams can compete for titles at different levels: NW1, NW2, NW3 and NW3 Elite. Find classes through the National Association of Canine Scent Work, which held its first national trial earlier this year. ■