



**Canine Consultants**  
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## Games Doggies Play

Did you know playing with your dog is not only fun, but good for Fido? Quality time with your dog builds trust, respect and can solidify your relationship as pack leader. Play allows him to use his mind & body while draining some excess energy – “A tired dog is a happy dog.” Don’t assume having a yard (or home) with various toys will keep him stimulated for very long while you are gone. Most of the time dogs lay around waiting for us to come home and play with them. Even having more than one pooch as a play pal isn’t necessarily the solution either.

Dogs want to interact with the pack leaders. Why else are they so happy to see us when we are gone for 10 minutes or 10 hours? Listed below are 10 favorite games we play with our two Labs, Tasha & Naoka. Even if you have a non-retriever breed, many of these activities can satisfy a dog’s need for mental and physical stimulation.

### 1) **Nothing in Life For Free**

We all love to give our dogs treats, but at our house a cookie, filled bone, piece of carrot or new toy comes with a hitch – the dog must perform a command, like sit, down, shake, bow, roll over, or heel position. Dogs get very motivated to please us this way. So before you hand him a bully stick, ask him to do a specific behavior. At mealtime waiting politely for the “okay” release from sit position is a must. If he doesn’t comply immediately, set the treat or bowl aside for a few minutes and then try again.

### 2) **Take it/ Hold it/ Give it**

The basis for many games requires the dog to hold an object in his mouth, like a ball or toy. Releasing the object politely in your hand is the last part. With your dog seated in front of you, treats at the ready, place a toy in your dog’s mouth and say “Take it” and then “Hold it.” After a second or two, say “Give it” in exchange for the treat. Extend the time of holding longer and longer. It may help if you have him on leash or drag line to begin with, so he doesn’t run off with the coveted item.

### 3) **Ball Toss**

Many dogs love the game of fetch, but some don’t always want to bring the ball back. Don’t chase him, since it puts him in Alpha position. You can walk away indicating game over. One trainer drilled a hole in a tennis ball and tied a rope through it, making a long line. Then when



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tossing the ball he could reel it back in along with the dog to reinforce fetch rules. Some dogs can play this game for hours, (with or without treats) but when you are tired, remove the item and put it away. The leader should always initiate and end the game. Tasha sometimes indicates she wants to play and if I am willing or able, I will agree, but sometimes I will say, "Not know, later....go lay down." My goal is to be in control of playtime and still get some quality ball toss time together, because she really loves it.

**4) Frisbee**

After achieving a solid fetch using Take it/ Hold it/Give it, try incorporating a different item, like a Frisbee (plastic or fabric – big or small.) Treats can be rewarded for a successful catch, return and release. This game works best on grass rather than a hard surface. Our girls get air in some spectacular catches and they know they did well from our praise & applause. We place one dog inside the house to view the action while the other performs, then switch places for the next dog. They have learned to wait patiently for their turn to play with us.

**5) Get the Mail/Newspaper**

Our Tasha loves a job and she daily helps bring in the mail or newspaper. She is very reliable off leash, but we suggest for safety-sake have your dog leashed when attempting this new behavior. "Want to get the mail?" perks her up even from a nap. We walk out to the box, I gather the items, and place a rolled up newspaper or a piece of mail easiest for her to carry in her mouth, using "Take it and let's go." After returning to the house I say "Give it" and reward her with a small cookie. Naoka who only observes at this point in time gets no cookie. Dogs do not expect equality, since that is a human conception.

**6) Find it**

Hunting for a hidden treats is a great way for your dog to earn the reward and allows him to use his eyes and even better his nose. Start off by letting your dog smell and see a treat, put him on a Sit/Stay, or tie out, or behind a closed door for no peeking. Place treats around a room or area (inside or out in the yard.) Release him and say "Find it" to explore the space, locate and devour 5-6 treats, first in obvious places and later add to the difficulty hiding treats in or under things. The more stinky the treats, the better they work, but avoid greasy ones for the sake of your furniture. You may need to stand near or even show him the hidden treat initially to guarantee success, but very soon your dog will get the hang of it and look out for fun! Do this with one dog at a time to avoid food competition among the pack.



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### 7) Hide and Seek

A great way to have fun and develop a personal bond with your dog is to hide from him, call his name and let him discover you in your hiding place. Reward his success with a treat. We have hidden in closets, bathtubs, shower stalls, under duvet covers on the bed, and behind furniture or draperies. Start in easy to find spots at first. When two humans play, one can keep the dog in a holding area while the other hides. Then say "Go to ..., Find them!"

### 8) Mental Challenges

There are a number of interactive games available in stores or via Internet pet supply sites that encourage your dog to roll toys or slide compartments to gain treats. These games should always be supervised since your doggie may destroy the item once the treats have been dispensed. We like to use a bottom-weighted, egg-shaped device with a slot opening to feed Naoka her kibbles, since she has a tendency to eat her dinner too fast. Some manufacturers rate the level of difficulty. So check out the market to select the right mental game for your pooch.

### 9) Clean Up!

Wouldn't it be wonderful if your doggie could put his toys back into the toy box? (Or even your kids, for that matter?) Well, Tasha does. Now this behavior did not happen overnight and we built on some abilities she had already developed. First of all, we have two sets of toys: a box on the floor dogs have access to anytime, and special toys on top of our hutch we bring down to play with our girls and later return to the hutch when finished. Tasha is no dummy, she may sport a toy from the toy box while looking up towards the hutch toys. Yes, she is baiting me and I can use that to an advantage. In order to play with me and the coveted toys, I ask her to return her current toy to the box by saying "Clean Up – Put Your Toy Away." We trained her for this task by reinforcing her fetch drive and placing the toy box below her head when asking her to "Give It." Instead to our hand, down drops the toy in the box! By practicing a few minutes for a number of days, she could successfully go and get a left out toy, take to the box and drop it in. Amazingly, dogs are the only animals who can be directed by a pointed finger. So now we can indicate each toy by pointing at it, one by one, for her to retrieve and deposit into the box using "Clean Up!" Eventually we only reward her with a treat after she has properly put away all toys from the whole house. This has become a bedtime ritual and you know dog's love routine.



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### 10) Tug With Me

A favorite of our girls is a very physical game of Tug. Though not advised for aggressive dogs or bully breeds, this game should be initiated and stopped by the human. Commands like Take It, Give It, and Come can be used. Don't chase your dog if he runs away with the toy, just look bored and walk away – game over. We keep ropes, jolly balls and other tug toys on the hutch and only bring them down for playtime. Find the right size, density and length of toy for your pooch. Play until you are tired or if play gets too rough, then call game over. Remove and store away, so doggie doesn't destroy it. Tasha has been known to chew through a rope in a half-second flat – whew!

If you and your dog have a favorite game you would like to share to our readers, please feel free to email us at [cidenise@cox.net](mailto:cidenise@cox.net) and we will gladly add it to our website.