

Tricks and Treats for Your Dog

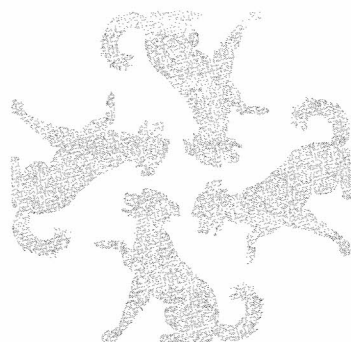
by Pam Murphy

Oso (page 18) delighted his family and their friends with his antics. What better month to teach your dog some tricks and pass out treats than October?

Think of the delighted reaction you'll get when greeting a stranger if you tell your Rottweiler/Pit Bull mix, "Say hello, Tess," and she proudly raises her paw and waves!

The process of teaching a dog to do anything on command—whether you want to call it a trick or obedience—is the same. The only difference is that one tends to make us smile or laugh, and the other makes us ooh and aah.

Our dogs already do many tricks that we brag we taught them. Truth be known, they were probably things our dogs did naturally that we inadvertently reinforced by laughing at them or giving them a treat. Many tricks can be taught by waiting out our dogs, catching them in a natural behavior, and then consistently reinforcing that behavior with rewards such as praise, toys, and treats. Other tricks require a little manipulation



to get the dog in the right position and then reinforcing that position.

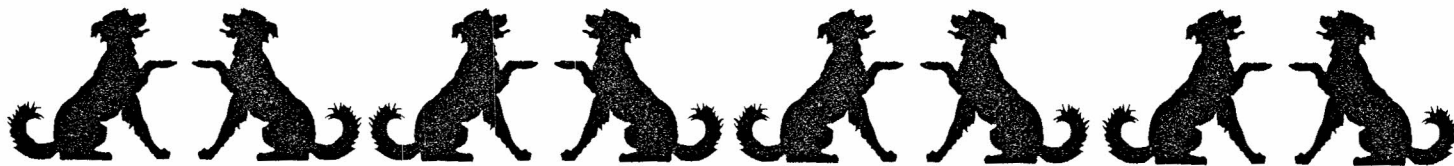
One way to begin is to hold a tasty treat or favorite toy in front of your dog and see what kind of behaviors are elicited. Some dogs will start pawing your hand (a beginning of "shake hands"); others will make a slight verbal noise (a beginning of "speak on command"). Some may sit up and beg; others may lie down. One dog might tilt her head to the side; another might, if you're sitting, put his head in your lap. If you want to put the behavior on cue (verbal command or hand signal) and dazzle your friends, teach it by following these steps:

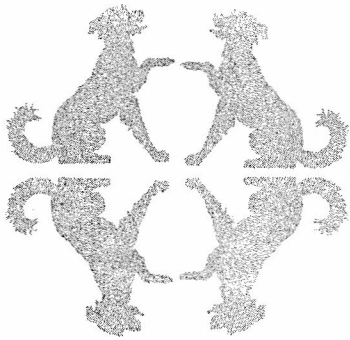
1) Every time the dog does the approximate behavior you want (pawing your hand, or the first rumblings of a bark), praise your dog and give her or him the treat.

2) Over time, say 20-30 repetitions, you'll begin to notice your dog offering a paw or bark automatically, and sooner. If you want just the paw raised instead of pawing your hand, reinforce with the reward as soon as the paw is raised. If you want an actual bark and not a slight whine, wait it out and increase the amount of the tasty treats. When your dog begins to vocalize closer to what you want, praise and treat. Continue to reinforce that level of behavior every time, until you see the automatic anticipation.

3) Once you know your dog is about ready to offer the trick you want (paw raise, bark etc.), add a cue word and/or signal ("Say hello" or "Speak") the instant before they actually do it. Repeat approximately 40-50 times over a period of several sessions, rewarding the dog each time he or she correctly offers the behavior.

4) At this point, the dog will probably start offering the behavior whenever he





or she hears the cue word. Start reinforcing only every second or third successful behavior. Eventually, move to just random reinforcement (no predictable ratio when they might expect a reward).

This random rewards system should continue for as long as you want your dog to do the trick on command.

If your dog doesn't offer the behavior naturally or you're not patient enough to wait for your dog to do it spontaneously, offer a little encouragement by trying the following.

Paw Raise to a Wave: Hold a treat above the dog's head and slightly to the side to get her or him off balance. When the paw on the opposite side raises even a little, praise and treat. If the dog already raises a paw and you want your hand touched, increase the level of reward and see if your dog tries harder and accidentally bumps your outstretched hand. When that happens, squeal with delight and give the extra big reward. To accomplish the wave, move the treat up and down a few times, and reinforce any waving motion. Eventually, raise the standard and reinforce only a more vigorous wave.

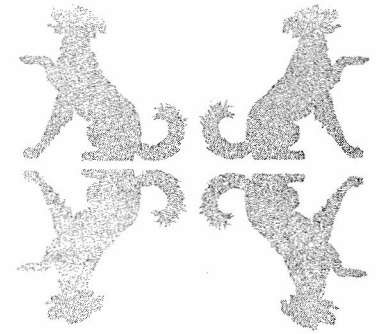
Roll Over: Put your dog in a down position on her or his side. Hold a treat by the dog's shoulder. When your dog's head turns to reach the treat, offer praise and the treat. Move the treat a little further around toward the dog's spine, offering praise and treat when that is accomplished. Continue moving the treat a little further until the dog begins to roll a

little—praise and treat. Any time the dog gets up or doesn't do the behavior, just ignore that and try again. With repetition over several days, the dog will start rolling further and further over on his or her back. At this point, reward and treat only when your dog does a complete roll over. Follow the steps as outlined above, without adding the cue "Roll Over" until the behavior is offered spontaneously.

Speak: If your dog won't vocalize when being teased with a treat, wait until a time you know your dog will bark (such as when your doorbell rings). When your dog barks, praise vigorously—maybe even join in! When you can anticipate the barking, slip in the cue word "Speak!" right before the bark, and praise and treat as soon as it begins. Once your dog is barking on cue, it will be especially helpful to teach the next command, "Enough!"

Enough, Quiet, or Shush: First, have your dog bark on command. Then distract her or him with a sharp noise or by grabbing the collar. At the same time, hold up a finger as a visual cue. When the barking stops, say "Quiet," praise your dog, and give a treat or toy. Repeat until the barking stops on just your finger cue. The second there is quiet, toss your dog's toy or treat so the association is made between quiet and the actual stopping of barking.

Toss and Catch: Your dog must know a sit/stay for this trick. Put your dog in a sit. Gently hold her muzzle closed and balance a doggy biscuit on top of her muzzle, right behind her nose. Tell her to stay while holding her muzzle, helping her to balance the treat. Suddenly release her with an enthusiastic "Okay!" Her head will probably toss the treat in the air and to the ground. Let her get it from the ground. As you repeat this hundreds of times, a dog usually becomes pretty efficient and will catch the treat before it hits the ground.



The mistake many people make when training a dog is to say the command *before* the dog knows what you want done. For example, if you say "shake hands" while your dog is sitting and he doesn't know the shake command, he may think sitting means shake hands. Many people have taught their dogs to run away on the come command simply by saying "come, come" while the dog is running away.

Another way to teach a trick is simply to physically position the dog to do the behavior you want. Shaking hands can be taught by just picking up one of your dog's paws, then praising and giving a treat or toy every time. After many repetitions, many dogs will begin to spontaneously offer a paw. Some, however, may become stressed because picking up a paw means nail clipping time—they may not view the experience positively. It sometimes takes longer to teach tricks this way, and some people feel it doesn't stimulate a dog to think, which is part of the fun of having them learn new tricks.

A couple good references for teaching your dog tricks are *Training Your Dog* by John Rogerson, and *Dog Tricks* by Capt. Arthur J. Haggerty and Carol Lea Benjamin. Both books are published by Howell Book House, New York.

