



Paw Prints

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Columnist

Common dog myths debunked

Call them legends or even old wives' tales, but don't call them facts. Whether it's a tip from a neighbor or something you remember from long ago, myths about dogs can steer you in the wrong direction.

These myths have been around since the domestication of dogs, and some of them stick around even today. Here are some misconceptions about dogs that just won't die:

It was once believed that dogs could see only in black and white. Many people still think this is the case. Dogs do see in color, but they see differently than most people do and are less able to distinguish between colors. Veterinary ophthalmologists have determined that dogs see like humans who have red/green color blindness. Dogs' eyes have receptors for blue and green shades, but not for red shades. As a result, it appears that dogs cannot easily distinguish

between yellow, green and red, but they can identify different shades of blue, purple and gray.

"Can't teach an old dog new tricks" is a myth that has become a popular cliché over the years, (usually referring to people). The fact is old dogs not only learn new tricks, but they thrive when being trained. While it isn't as easy to teach an older dog new tricks, it can still be accomplished. A senior dog might no longer possess the reflexes or energy of an enthusiastic puppy, but with some patience on the pet parent's part, introducing new skills to an old dog is perfectly achievable.

Another old wives tale, which is probably the biggest dog-health misconception around, is that if your dog's nose is warm or dry, it indicates he's sick. The moisture content or even the temperature of a dog's nose are not measurements of his health.

For instance, your pooch's nose is often dry and/or warm if he has just woken up, and this is perfectly normal. But if his nose is persistently dry and crusted, it could be a sign of a health problem; just check with your vet.

Have you ever seen your dog eat grass? The myth is that a dog will eat grass to induce vomiting, and it's true that dogs will often throw up after eating a lot of grass. However, this does not mean they ate that grass to induce vomiting, or that it is somehow a sign of illness.

While nobody knows the

exact reasons why dogs eat grass, it is possible that they just actually like grass. Some dogs like to graze, while others chomp.

Enough grass in the stomach can create minor irritation and cause Fido to vomit. Some experts believe that a dog's taste for grass goes back to the days when dogs' ancestors, such as wolves, ate the stomach contents of its prey, usually grass, leaves, etc. Regardless of the reason, it's relatively harmless as long as the grass is not chemically treated.

So you think that a few table-scrap are okay for your dog? Think again. One ounce of cheddar cheese for a 20-pound dog is like a human eating more than one-and-a-half chocolate bars. In other words, table scraps are empty calories for dogs. Your precious pooch needs precisely balanced nutrition for his specific life stage to continue to remain healthy.

For instance, eating scraps of ham could create gastrointestinal problems and pancreatic concerns. Do your furry friend a favor and stick to his nutritional dog food and treats.

Most people think that if a dog's tail is wagging that is a sign of a happy dog. But

that is not always the case. And this happens to be a dangerous misconception that sometimes leads to dog bites. While tail-wagging often means that a dog is happy or excited, it can also suggest anxiety or even fear, which can be aggression triggers.

Some people believe that just letting their dog out in the yard is enough exercise, and that, too, is myth. Dogs

need mental stimulation as well as physical activity. If you leave your dog out in the yard alone, they might not get much of either. It's important to take them for walks, play fetch or simply run around together. Of course different-sized dogs may require different levels of activity, and not only will it make for a happier, healthier dog but it will also help strengthen your relationship.



PHOTO BY JODI SCHNEIDER MCNAMEE

Buddy is an older dog that loves to learn new things.



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