



Paw Prints

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Columnist

Do you and your dog get enough exercise together?

Wild dogs spend about 80 percent of their waking hours hunting and scavenging for food. Domestic dogs have been helping and working alongside us for thousands of years. Most dogs are bred for a specific purpose, such as hunting, farming, or protection.

Whether dogs were working for us or scavenging on their own, their survival once depended on lots of exercise and problem-solving.

But what about now?

Boredom and excess energy are two common reasons for behavior problems in dogs. They're meant to lead active lives, just like people.

Most dogs usually spend a little time outside, mainly when going out to "the bathroom." But many pet parents don't fully appreciate the added benefits from allowing their dogs to spend more significant time outdoors. Spending quality time with your dog, just 30 minutes together outdoors, will benefit both you and your

furry friend.

Taking at least one outing per day will help keep you and your pooch physically fit, plus it gives him opportunities to explore the world. Walking your dog daily is a great place to start, but the real quality time comes when you're both interacting together. And there are many fun and exciting things you and your furry friend can do side by side.

Here are five easy backyard games to play with your dog:

"Fetch" is a standard backyard game for dogs with a decent retrieval instinct. Running to retrieve a ball or toy is great exercise, and reinforces the human-doggie bond.

It seems that some dogs don't need to be taught to retrieve a toy; it's almost a natural instinct. But for those who don't have that ingrained interest, try smearing peanut butter on it, and try using Fido's favorite toy or ball. Then you can reinforce the "picking up" behavior by first rewarding any contact with the ball with a treat. Of course there is always that one dog that is possessive and won't bring his toy back to you

after retrieving it. Just show him you have treats once the ball is in his mouth, and then offer to trade the ball for a treat. Do this until your dog understands that if he chases and then releases the ball, something good happens. Hopefully, soon he will forget about the treats!

Agility is an athletic and competitive dog sport that requires a dog to navigate an obstacle course. You don't have to enroll your pooch in classes or compete to have fun, even in a small backyard. Inexpensive agility equipment is available online, or you can even make your own. Just choose the agility equipment that would best suit your type of dog such as jumps, tunnels, weave-poles, tire-jumps, chutes, or teeter-totters.

Another great game is "hide and seek" using treat-dispensing toys in the backyard. Once your dog understands how to use these toys, you can start hiding them in corners of the yard, or under bushes and behind trees to make the game even more challenging. You can even time Fido as he gets better and faster at finding the treats.

Digging in a sandbox is



PHOTO BY JODI SCHNEIDER MCNAMEE

Katie gets to spend lots of time outside having fun.

GREAT for dogs who like to dig. Use a child's sandbox with a cover so that neighborhood cats don't make it a litter box. Remember to use only clean sand that you can buy right at your local hardware store. Bury Fido's favorite chews or toys in the sandbox and give him a hint on how to dig them up. Soon he'll understand that he will be rewarded for his efforts, and you'll avoid having to fill in another hole along your fence.

And it's still warm enough for staying cool in the puppy pool. A shallow

pool can mean hours of backyard fun during the summer months, when your dog may want to cool off with a dip. Toss apple slices, baby carrots, or your pooch's favorite treat in the pool for a kind of "bobbing for treats" game. This is also a great way to persuade skeptical dogs to get their feet wet.

There is still enough time for these or any other backyard games you can think of before the winter months, so take delight in the quality time that you and your furry family can spend together.

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