

## Kong Stuffing Pointers

### Why Stuff a Kong?

Dogs are animals that are genetically programmed to hunt for their food. Part of the reason there is such a prevalence of behavior problems in pet dogs is that they have so little mental challenge or work to do: their food is given to them for free. Zoos have had some success in decreasing behavior problems and improving the quality of life of many of their predator and primate species by giving them problems to solve in order to obtain their food. This same environmental enrichment concept can be applied to domestic dogs, who thoroughly enjoy finding hidden food and unpacking stuffed chew toys.

### Stuffing Suggestions



Many people's Kong stuffing efforts consist of inserting a few dog cookies. This is scratching the surface of the creative food acquisition challenges you can cook up for your dog. Here are a few pointers and principles to bump your Kong stuffing prowess up to the next level:

- The level of difficulty should be appropriate to the dog's level of experience and temperament - is he persevering or a "giver-upper." Any increases in level of difficulty should be done gradually, so the dog succeeds while developing perseverance. In other words, start easy and then make it tougher
- Easy stuffings are: loose and incorporate small, easy-to-fall-out pieces
- More difficult stuffings are: tighter, with some big pieces that take concerted effort and hole-squishing to get in (and thus will be difficult to extract)
- You can employ a matrix (peanut butter, cream cheese, canned food, toddler food) to hold the smaller bits in and give the dog side-polishing challenges
- You can wrap a stuffed Kong in an old cloth diaper or clean rag and/or enclose it in an old margarine or other container (try Quaker oatmeal cardboard containers!) to increase the level of difficulty through "nesting"
- Hide regular stuffed or nested Kongs around the house so the dog has to hunt around to find them before unpacking them

- Give him all of his food this way, especially if he is a particularly "busy" dog
- Stuff meat, mashed potatoes etc. in it and freeze. Or, plug the small hole with peanut butter and fill the cavity with broth, then freeze this to make a "Kongsicle" (note: this can be messy - best to give it to your dog outside!)
- Stuff cheese cubes in and then microwave it briefly to nicely coat the insides
- Clean your Kongs regularly with a bottle brush and/or in the dishwasher

### **Recipe Examples**



#### Tight (more advanced) Stuffing

Layer 1 (deepest): roasted unsalted cashews, mild cheese chunks, freeze dried liver bits

Layer 2: dog kibble, cookies or Liver Biscotti, Cheerios, sugar-free/salt-free peanut butter, dried banana chips

Layer 3: baby carrot stick(s), turkey and/or leftover ravioli or tortellini, dried apples, dried apricots

Pack as tightly as possible. The last item in should be a dried apricot or piece of ravioli, presenting a smooth "finish" under the main hole. Bon appetit!

#### "Lite" Version

For cashews, substitute crumbled rice cake; for freeze-dried liver, substitute Caesar croutons; for peanut butter substitute fat-free cream cheese

#### **Other Energy Outlets for Dogs...**

Clicker training and trick training

Ball fetch, Frisbee fetch, Tug of War (see SPCA "rules" handout)

Flyball and Agility

Dog-dog play