Dog: Leave It Command

Benefit
When your dog can leave things on command, you can direct her not to pick up or even go near certain things—a very useful ability. For example, you can prevent your dog from accidentally ingesting toxic substances or you can save your new pair of shoes from a set of teeth marks.

What You Need
- High-value treats like chicken or cheese, or a favorite toy.
- A clicker, if you use one. Otherwise, say "yes!" to mark the behavior.
- A quiet area without distractions for practicing.
- 5 minutes 2–3 times daily.

How to Train It

Step 1: Place treats in both your hands. Hold out a treat to your dog in a closed fist. As she sniffs at your hand, say "leave it!" Watch her closely. The instant she turns away, give her a different treat using your other hand.

Step 2: Repeat step 1 several times until your dog leaves the treat alone the instant you use the command. Then switch hands. That is, hold the treat she doesn't get in the hand previously giving the treat and give the treat with the other hand. Repeat the exercise until your dog gets it right every time.

Step 3: Put a treat on the floor and cup your hand over it so your dog can see the treat, but can't get to it. Give the "leave it" command and reward with a different treat when she withdraws from the treat under your hand. Repeat this step several times.

Step 4: Put a treat on the floor at a slight distance from your dog. Give the "leave it" command and reward her for ignoring the treat on the floor. It can help, initially, to have her on leash and attach the leash to a heavy piece of furniture. This way, if she ignores the command the leash will stop her from getting the treat and being rewarded for ignoring you.

Step 5: Once your dog reliably responds to the "leave it" command in the exercises in steps 1–4, begin to practice outside or in other locations than your house. At this point, always now use things other than treats as the bait (toys, tissues, things your dog may find on walks).