

Jobs for your dog ©

How teaching your dog to help around the house can benefit you both

We have all looked on in awe and admiration at assistance dogs who happily help their owners in day-to-day life. But have you ever thought about how your dog could help you? Teaching your dog a few jobs around the house is not as difficult as you may think – and is hugely beneficial to both you and your dog. While you might not need a fully trained assistance dog, you might struggle bending down to pick up something dropped on the floor or need a helping hand emptying the washing machine, or you might just be a busy mum with piles of laundry and need a help stacking the washing machine to save time!



Dotty the author's JRT: Time for some work

If you have a dog who will tug at a raggy toy, fetch a tennis ball, push with his nose or pull with his paw, then you have a dog who can pick up a dropped pen (instead of chewing it on the cream carpet), fetch the mail (instead of shredding it), and push or pull the living room door closed (instead of nudging you for attention). Your dog will love carrying out these tasks!

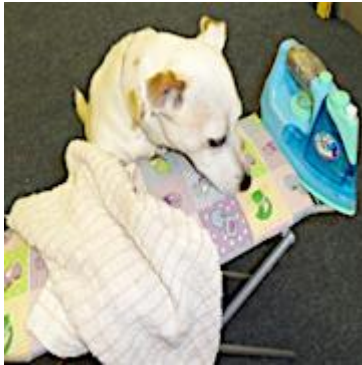
Some of the things our dogs do that we find irritating, is perfectly normal canine behaviour. Because we lead such busy lives, we sometimes find it hard to spend quality time with our dogs. While our dogs certainly enjoy their walk in the park twice a day and a good long run on a Sunday, why do they still pester us while we are checking our emails, glancing at Facebook or when we are busy? The answer is simple: they are often bored. But it is so easy to teach your dog to help you with a few tasks around the house, leaving you to enjoy a glass of wine with your feet up at the end of the day without your dog pestering you. The extra tasks you give him will leave him happily tired, satisfied and contentedly resting.



Dotty the author's JRT: Now where is the iron?

By teaching your dog fun tasks, such as fetching slippers, picking up dropped car keys or finding the TV remote, you are not only challenging him mentally, you are greatly improving the bond

between you and making him feel a valued family member. Twenty minutes of teaching a task (work in short time slots of five minutes) is enough to tire your dog out for a couple of hours (now that's got you interested hasn't it?). Your dog will be so enthusiastic about learning these new games that you need to be constantly coming up with new ideas!



Dotty the author's JRT: Never mastered folding

Teaching your dog to do some household jobs will positively affect his overall wellbeing. You may see a difference when you go for your walk as better connection builds between you. You may find that your dog is calmer, possibly less reactive, perhaps less determined to pull down the road or to jump up at the lady in the park who always gives free chicken. These changes happen because *you* have become more interesting and attentive to your dog's needs, and he is becoming more focussed on *you* rather than somebody or something else. A calmer dog means a more relaxed owner, and this in turn goes 'down the lead' and helps prevent or greatly reduce behaviour issues.



Dotty the author's JRT: All done – time for tea!

Clicker training is by far the best way to teach tasks. I am using the word 'task' rather than 'trick' because I have found that many people say they don't want to teach tricks. To a dog, however, there is no difference between a 'trick' and a 'task' – they should all be the same fun exercises whether teaching a formal recall, a timed stay or even static sit, down and stand' exercises. Fetching your slippers is a 'formal' recall!

Why not move your training in a new direction and teach something different? Watch your dog's eyes light up when you reach for the clicker and tiny treats and head for the laundry room with a pile of cloths to be placed in the washing machine – by your dog! (Remember to take the training treats out of his daily food portion to avoid excess weight gain.) Instead of getting frustrated when your dog pesters the visitors, whilst the kettle is boiling and the coffee is brewing, show off his new trick while your friends look on in awe wondering if they can teach their dogs how to do that!

You don't need to worry about whether your dog is too large or too small to do the sort of tasks that qualified assistance dogs do. Several charities train dogs as large as Leonbergers and as small as Border Terriers for assistance work, so size does not matter as long as your dog is physically capable of carrying out the task.

What sort of tasks could your Jack Russell Terrier or 'Cavachon' do? He could be taught to empty the washing machine without tearing the clothing, fetch the post without killing it first, pick up pens, credit cards, pegs and litter without chewing them or fetch a bottle of water, a blanket or your slippers. Perhaps he could take your shoes back to the shoe stand, find a missing sock or bring you a beer from the fridge? All these tasks, and many more besides, can be taught while you and your dog enjoy quality time together.

Why else might you want to teach these skills? Well, you never know what's around the corner! You could have a misfortune and suddenly put your back out or trip and sprain your ankle, and you will either be very grateful for the fun tasks you taught your dog – or very frustrated you hadn't...



Teddy at his final assessment earning his jacket.

Teddy is a Cavachon who is a fully legally qualified Assistance Dog, trained with the support of the charity DogAID and myself. He helps his owner Karen with a number of tasks and is one of the most amazing little dogs I have met! He has such a sense of humour but takes his work seriously when needed.

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