

Training An Older Dog

The popular saying 'you can't teach an old dog new tricks' is simply a myth. My ten year old Golden Retriever greets each day mentally alert and eager to 'play' in new found ways. That is more than proof that it's possible to teach an old dog a new trick.

Dogs exhibit a strong hold on old habits. Therefore, the first step in teaching new tricks is going through the process of un-learning the old ones. This requires a great deal of patience and persistence on the trainer's part.

The next step is taking a dog's age into consideration. An older dog will tire more easily and lose interest in the task at hand. The will to run, jump and fetch will still be there, an older dog just won't know quite how to follow through on that. Take these physical limitations into account.

Shorter time training sessions will net bigger results. Obstacle courses should be kept to a shorter distance. Throw a ball three or four times then move on. When an older dog is facing away from you, it is often not bad behavior but common hearing loss.

Schedule longer periods of recovery time with an older dog. There is no physical limitations knowledge present. The older dog will simply keep going long after it has become safe to do so. Overdoing physical activity can lead to stretched ligaments and open the way for injuries.

Refrain from the urge to reward an older dog with treats. It leads to 'over-treating' which causes weight gain in older dogs that is often hard to shed.

Consistency is still essential, even with older dogs. Scheduled play time that begins and ends about the same time each day. Specific 'play' areas will help an older dog adjust to training as well. They are adaptable to familiar environments.

My Goldens have been trained to play fetch in the backyard but never the forest. The tennis ball fetch behavior can be expanded to include the forest when it comes to retrieving fallen deer antlers.

One of the most natural dog behaviors can be re-directed to a more positive area. The behavior of digging can not be extinguished entirely.

If a forest is not present in the backyard, a perfect digging area can be created. Simply make a ten-by-twelve foot penned in area and let the dog dig to its hearts content. This will allow the dog its primal urge to dig but control where it takes place. The area gets 'marked' by scent and ground composition. This is something that even older dogs can learn and appreciate.

Teaching new tricks should build on an older dog existing strengths. It is ineffective to teach or enforce

new ones. One can be excellent in fetch while another wants to hang on to a ball as long as possible. Instead of forcing a behavior can lead to frustration on the part of the dog and the trainer. With a dog that is unwilling to let go of the ball, another training trick can be pulling a wagon by the string. 'Fetch and release' can also teach a new trick of getting the food container. This comes in handy with a trainer getting older as well!