

Variety beats boredom for pets

As we count down the last few days of Autumn, people want to make full use of the good days. Dogs also enjoy that the summer heat is no longer such a strain, so they can cavort around just as they like. So it's the best time to do something for the fitness of your four-legged friend's body and soul. The experts at Maxi Zoo's retail chain suggest some helpful tips on playing in the open with your dog...

PET POINTERS



with Tony Cross

Whether it's walking or real sport, the fun and variety is most important. Motivate your dog – depending on its character – with praise or tit-bits and take care not to over-strain it. Young dogs particularly shouldn't be animated with jumping as that stresses the growing joints and tendons. Older or sick animals too should be challenged more mentally than bodily.

Boredom in dogs is not unusual nowadays; even the daily walk can become monotonous over time. Apart from getting enough running around, the mental challenge is often missing. You can build mental exercise into normal "walkies" by simply hiding your dog's favourite toy and let it show off its sniffing skills. "Clicker training", for instance, sets a greater challenge. Here the dog learns first of all that a specific click tone means it has done well. You can teach your dog many tricks with the aid of this precise method of rewarding. Exact instructions on this can be obtained from books and dog obedience classes.

You can also get your dog going with some varied and challenging ball throwing. For sportier dogs, there's frisbee where you throw the frisbee and the dog plays "catcher" with its muzzle. "Dog dancing" will also get your dog moving; or "flyball", where the dog catches a flying ball, will really challenge both dog and master. Hurdle courses are excellent for "agility" and, dogs which enjoy running often, can't get enough of this.

Always be mindful of the age of your dog when playing: whelps can strain themselves quickly without their fervour appearing to wane. With large or older dogs, it should also be borne in mind that the joints cannot take so much pressure. So, over-riotous play should be avoided. Take abnormal fatigue or disinterest as a signal to end the game. Also, choose a good place to play: soft ground is better than hard tarmac on which the dog could injure itself by racing off and stopping quickly. Regardless of what you and your dog undertake, play and sport is teamwork - and teamwork strengthens the bond with your dog.

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