



The Canine Workout – Outdoors

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For those lucky dogs who enjoy access to a fenced-in yard, there is an assortment of activities that can be enjoyed, for the solitary dog as well as for dog-human playmates!

Retrieve: Playing a hearty game of retrieve has always been great exercise. You can expand on its efficacy by throwing uphill to work your dog's hind limbs, and retrievals through water are a great full-body endurance workout.



Tug: Tug is no doubt one of your dog's favorite pastimes! Fortunately, it's a great strength-building exercise as well as a fun bonding activity that we can do with our dogs. By holding the tug at head level, your dog is working out his rear legs. By tugging at ground level, he's working out his front legs. **Caution:** It's important that you do *not* jerk the tug toy quickly from side to side or up and down, as this can cause injury.

Check out the article *Games to Play with your Dog* (<http://www.examiner.com/pet-training-in-newark/games-to-play-with-your-dog>) for playing retrieve with rules.

Digging: Some dogs are unabashed diggers. The dachshund, for example, was bred to dig in search of rodents. Digging is actually a good source of exercise – it's a great workout for the forelimbs. So, rather than trying to inhibit the behavior completely, it's better to reach a compromise by giving your dog a designated digging area or sandbox in which to exercise this instinctive behavior. In order to attract the behavior to the designated area, dig a shallow hole and lightly bury a ziplock baggy of treats. As he digs to reveal the baggy, open it up and produce a treat for him. As he progresses, plant the baggy slightly deeper in the dirt. You can use a heavier dirt medium or pack it more tightly for added challenge.

You can also bury stuffed puzzle toys in the soil for his search and recovery. Make sure to supervise so that you can discourage your dog's wandering to other parts of the lawn. For building a canine athlete, do this exercise 3 or 4 times a week.

Walkies!: Taking your dog for a walk is not necessarily beneficial if the walk is a slow saunter as he sniffs p-mail and leaves his own. In order to get cardiovascular benefit and build endurance, you want your dog to settle into a trot gait. Start your walk at a clip fast enough so that your dog needs to trot to keep up. After he's settled into this gate, you can often slow your own speed and he will continue on at a trot.

(cont.)

Other Yard Activities

- Hang tug toys from tree branches for some solitary tug play. Perhaps start by hanging toys that the two of you have used in tugging games together.
- Some dogs enjoy tossing a *Jolly ball* (large, inflatable rubber ball) around the yard.
- Putting a *Buster Cube* or *Tricky Treat ball* filled with kibble out in the yard can be a great pastime.
- Fill a kiddie wading pool with water for a pleasant cooling station for your pooch. Exercise care with small dogs – they should be able to get in and out easily and the water level should be appropriate for their size.
- Take a class in agility, flyball or nose work at a local training facility and then set up a course in your backyard. These are fun activities that you can do together! Check out the article *Breed-Specific Sports for your Dog* (<http://www.examiner.com/dog-training-in-national/dog-sports>) for more sporting ideas.

A Word to the Wise

It's important that you supervise your dog while he spends time in the yard. You don't want him developing bad habits like barking at passers-by, fence running, or chasing small critters that enter the yard unwittingly. And of course, too much time outside, especially on especially hot or cold days (depending on the dog), can be dangerous, so watch for signs of excessive panting, heat exhaustion, or shivering. If your pooch asks to go inside, he's had enough!

Consider your dog's athletic program with the same caution and care as you would your own. As with any exercise regimen, start gradually. And consult your vet about whether there are exercises you should avoid because of your dog's physical limitations.