



# PET PROJECT QUARTERLY

YOUR NEWS FROM MARY'S PET PROJECT

Help yourself to a copy to read at home or share with another pet parent.  
 New clients save \$5 with this newsletter, holidays excluded.

## Highlights

### How Have We Helped?

\* We noticed a cat client's behavior and eating were not normal and took him to vet. The blockage was found and treated before it became life-threatening.

\* A tree at a client's house crashed through their fence and landed on a neighbor's roof. We coordinated with insurance company and made sure the tree was removed and the fence was repaired so the dogs wouldn't escape.

\* We became concerned about the weight loss and decreased energy of a dog walking client. Her vet diagnosed her with diabetes and was able to treat her just in time.

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## LIVING WITH DOGS

### If You Like It, Reward It

A simple fact of biology is that all organisms do more of what rewards them. If you received twenty dollars every time you smiled, you'd walk around grinning. If wearing a certain coat predictably unleashed a flurry of compliments on you, chances are that coat would spend very little time in your closet.

Dogs are no different. Any behavior they think works to get them something they want becomes more frequent. Say your dog drops a tennis ball in front of you and barks, and you pick up the ball and throw it. You just trained your dog to bark to have his favorite game perpetuated.

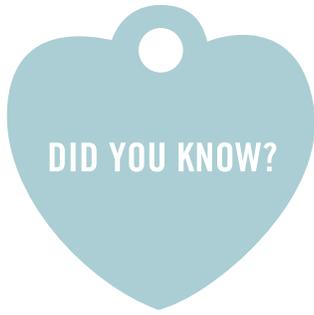
As a strategy, barking paid off and sure enough your dog will bark more. By contrast, ignoring the ball and walking away teaches the dog that barking doesn't work. When he next drops the ball by your feet without barking, pick it up and throw it to reinforce the delightful quiet.



This simple exercise contains the essence of dog training: Ignore what you don't like and be quick to reward what you *do* like. The principle applies to all situations and it pays to become aware of the many ways we accidentally reinforce behaviors we don't like. We often reward a dog for jumping up to greet us, either by petting and sweet-talking the dog, or by pushing him away and saying 'no,' which is more than enough attention to be reinforcing. Turning away or leaving is much more effective.

To get a well-behaved dog quickly, always be on the lookout for ways to reinforce behaviors you like. Four paws on the floor when greeting, for example, should always earn a 'good dog' or a pet or a treat.

**"Dogs' lives are too short.  
 Their only fault, really."  
 - Agnes Sligh Turnbull**



### These Doggie Facts?

- Dogs have far fewer taste buds than humans, but the 200 million scent receptors in their nasal folds (compared to our 5 million) nevertheless make some of them very finicky eaters.
- The hair on a dog's muzzle, eyes, and jaws are touch-sensitive hairs called vibrissae that can sense tiny changes in airflow.
- Dogs have 39 pairs of chromosomes. Humans have 23.
- Dogs have about 10 vocal chords. Cats have more than 100.
- Studies show dogs can learn to distinguish up to 100 words.
- Dogs' eyes are more sensitive to light and movement than ours but lack our focal range flexibility—you spot the tennis ball in the grass right away; your dog notices a bug flitting a wing somewhere in the periphery instead.



## A WORLD OF DOGS

### Cultivating Dog-Smart Kids

For half a century, the Lassie stereotype has endured in American hearts and minds. The ideal dog is noble, has the vocabulary of a college student, and near-telepathic understanding of what's expected of him. It makes for lovely storytelling, but the imprint left on generations by Lassie and similar fictions, from Dorothy's Toto to Disney's Bolt, is one that sets many a first-time dog owner up for disappointment and frustration. Oh, we know dogs are not people.



But surely they understand the difference between a chewie and an Italian shoe?

In fact, dogs are more like happy-go-lucky aliens trying to navigate our strange world of rules and expectations. To better help them, a good place for us to start is with greater understanding of how they see the world. Here, humane education plays a crucial role.

The term brings to mind aproned children petting rabbits or fashioning cat toys from strings and feathers—and that's part of the picture, of course. But in many humane societies and classrooms, the curriculum has greatly evolved. Children now learn about all aspects of animal behavior, training, and conservation. They talk about cruelty-free shopping and responsible pet guardianship; they invent socialization plans for hypothetical puppies; they witness spay or neuter surgeries and discuss animal population management; they brush dog coats and learn poop-scooping technique.

Why is this so important? For one thing, children educated about dogs are much more likely to behave safely around them—which means the dogs are safer, too. And dog-savvy children grow up to be dog-savvy adults, a necessity in a world with ever-increasing numbers of dogs living close together. Once primarily the domain of wannabe veterinarians and animal control officers, all-around proficiency in dog behavior and training is now an important life skill. This is especially true for people in cities and suburbs where every stroll to the park or day spent in the yard involves some level of dog management, whether navigating a busy sidewalk or keeping the bark frequency and pitch at a level that won't drive neighbors to distraction. It's a good thing, then, that humane education programs are more popular than ever and are expanding to allow more kids to get personal with pooches.

*(continued from page 1)*

\* We have come to the rescue of clients when they accidentally lock themselves out of their homes, help them catch dogs who escape from their yards, and schedule last minute visits when they have a health or family emergency.

\* We address sprinkler, pool, and alarm issues. We dispose of the mice and birds killed by pet cats. We even deal with "visiting" raccoons, possums, and ducks.



## DOGS IN ACTION

### Autism Service Dogs

Also called autism assistance or autism alert dogs, these are dogs that live alongside children or adults with autism. (In contrast to autism therapy dogs, who visit treatment and residential centers.) Of course, children and adults with autism are individuals and not all benefit from a service dog. But for those who respond well, it can be life-changing. Characteristic of most



autism spectrum disorders is the tendency to live in one's own world. A dog can be a bridge to the outside world. The unique bond that grows between dogs and humans entices many kids and adults with autism to open up, communicate more, initiate interactions, and relax in situations that otherwise cause stress.

Dogs chosen as autism service dogs must be "bombproof," meaning they stay calm in almost any circumstance. The singular skill of an autism service dog includes distracting from repetitive behaviors or 'meltdowns' with a nudge of the nose or a paw, as well as being tethered to a person to prevent and protect him from wandering. The benefits can include positive changes in behavior, emotional comfort, being able to go to restaurants and shops, and better and longer sleep for everyone in the family as the person with autism may wake less when co-sleeping with the dog.



## HEALTHY DOG

### Dog First Aid & CPR

Prompt and informed first aid saves lives—for dogs as well as humans. Losing a dog to an asthma attack or a common type of poisoning is all the more tragic in cases where CPR skills or knowledge of first aid could have kept the dog alive until his owners reached a veterinarian. And not just those who hike backcountry trails with their dogs or live far from the nearest pet hospital need to consider such scary scenarios. Dogs can choke on bits of kibble on the kitchen floor. Thankfully, courses for pet guardians are readily available in most parts of the country. Learn to perform pet CPR and first aid, including tending to wounds and recognizing emergencies. Most good classes cover choking management, insect bite, stings and snakebites, heat and cold injuries, vitals assessment, and seizures.

To take a pet first aid class in person, check with your local humane society or animal shelter, or visit First Aid for Pets ([firstaidforpets.net](http://firstaidforpets.net)) for online courses.

## DOG IN THE SPOTLIGHT

### The Labrador Retriever

Stomach on legs, expert swimmer and counter surfer, famously trainable—the Lab is a dog of many distinctions. The well-socialized Lab is bouncy outdoors, gentle when cuddling on the couch, and can put her paw to anything from tracking to agility, from competitive obedience to police and therapy work. The Lab is the most popular breed worldwide, even in countries where the Cottonelle Puppy ad has never run on TV. Life with a Lab is not without challenges, though. Given half a chance, she'll chew her way through carpets and shoes, eat candy wrappers off the sidewalk, and dive into any mudhole. Training and ample exercise is the cure and a must if your Lab is to thrive. Catch recent Labs in the limelight in *Orange is the New Black* (Little Boo the therapy dog) or in *Who Gets the Dog?* (Wesley).

To re-home a Lab, visit your local shelter or rescue group.

