

MJ'S PET TRAINING ACADEMY, LLC

TRAINING THE TREAT SENSITIVE PUPPY WITH FOOD

This guide discusses the use of food in training, from correct use to ethical considerations, as well how to safely use food without throwing off a balanced diet.



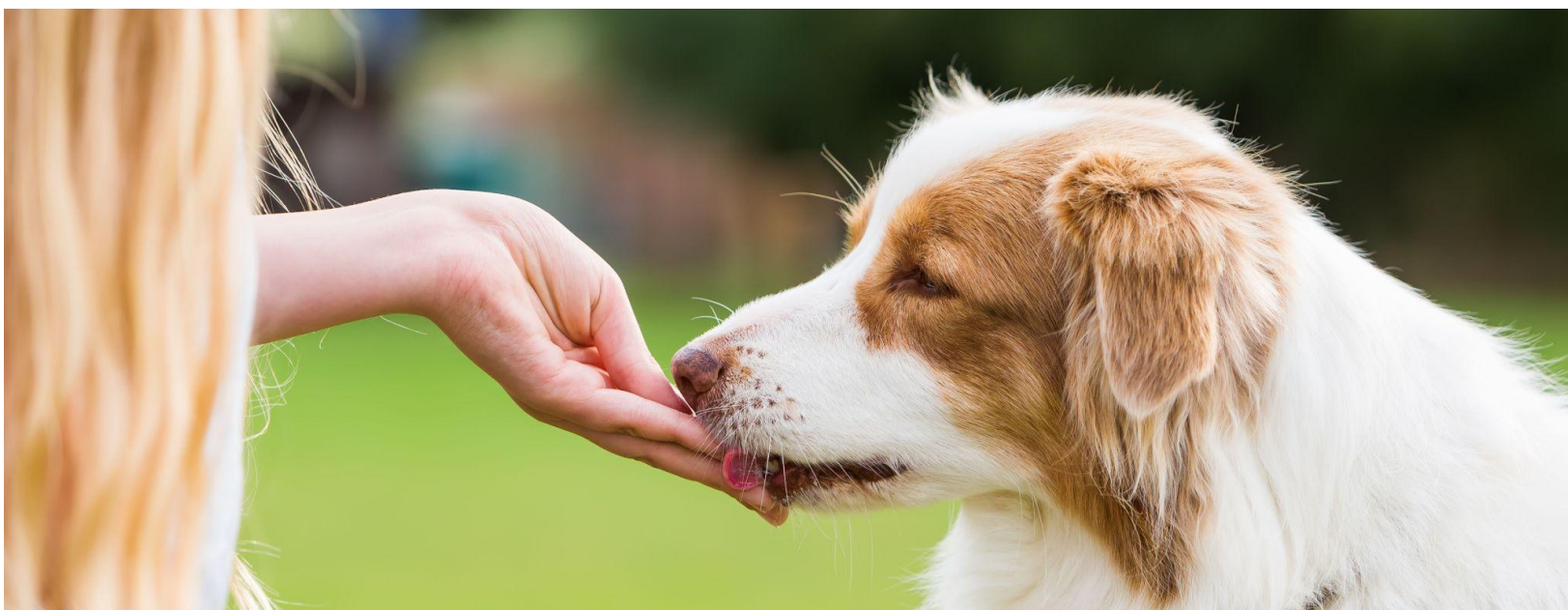
BY MJ VIERA

Written by : MJ Viera

MJ's Pet Training Academy,LLC

Copy Courtesy of:

Pet professionals are encouraged to use and distribute this guide with their own clients. Please feel free to add your business name and logo to this MJ's Guide without removing the author/business credit above.



Introduction

Pet owners who plan on using treats as a part of their puppies' training, will likely have questions regarding how to protect their puppy from gaining unnecessary weight or experiencing stomach upset. While attending a puppy class once a week won't throw off a balanced diet, the daily training practice recommended by professional trainers adds up.

The purpose of this guide is to answer the question, how can puppy owners safely use treats and food as a part of their reinforcement strategy? This guide is written with both the new and experienced puppy owner in mind as well as pet professionals working closely with pet owners. This short guide will cover key areas relating to the use of treats in dog training. This guide is intended to be especially helpful for those struggling with training a puppy with food sensitivities.

MJ's Guides are written with the goal to provide key points in order to help pet owners make decisions about the care and training of their pets. This guide does not replace professional training. Please contact MJ's Pet Training Academy to book in-person or virtual training and consultations.

Although this guide discusses food treats and their use in dog training, it is not intended as a guide on choosing food and treats for health or dietary purposes. Readers should consult with their veterinarian should they have any questions or concerns regarding their pet's diet.

Should Puppy Owners Use Treats to Train Their Puppy?

Some puppy owners will have concerns when it comes to the use of food in training. With opinions popping up all over the place, from one extreme to the other on the use of treats, it can be confusing to decide whether or not to use them. No one wants to believe their dog only listens to them because they have treats, but that belief is holding a dog and owner back from successful training, it's worth taking a few minutes to reevaluate things.

The dreaded scenario is that a dog will only come for the sound of a bag of treats shaking, and will be completely unruly if there is not a pocket full of food within a nose's reach. Unfortunately, the things that many pet owners fear are exactly what they are teaching their dogs because they are misinformed about *how* to use food in training.

Food can be used with dogs that are very motivated by it as well as dogs that barely seem to have an interest in it during training. The highly food-motivated dog should learn how to be polite while working around food. This type of dog should learn about taking food gently, following a lure without being pushy, and ignoring dropped food. These are important skills for all dogs in addition to the highly food motivated ones.

The less food-motivated dog will usually surprise owners when they change their delivery techniques or enhance even lower-value food. Dogs that are not motivated by food might also be in an environment that is too difficult to begin the training in. Owners can begin with fewer distractions to test this.

Dogs do not have to be extremely food motivated in order to successfully train them. Variety is everything. All dogs should learn about the many types of reinforcement such as chasing a toy, the toy switch game, a change in the handler's behavior, praise, sniffing, and so on.

The idea that "treat training" is somehow its own category of training is a huge misconception. While trainers oftentimes will self-categorize based on their methods, style, or even sport of interest, trainers from all different backgrounds and methods use food reinforcement. Any trainer relying solely on treats without having an in-depth understanding of behavior and learning theory is not likely a trainer at all.

Many professional trainers will use food reinforcement, but there is a lot more going on in addition to feeding the dog. Using food reinforcement correctly does not make a pet owner solely a treat trainer. as it's not its own style of training.

Food is used to reinforce behavior. Pet owners should practice training without their hand in their treat bag and learn to get their dog's attention without dangling food first. Luring is a useful skill, but being able to surprise the dog with appropriately timed food reinforcement is essential. Owners should take care not to confuse purposeful luring with mistakenly grabbing treats every time they need their dog to engage.

Owners might want their dog to listen just because. Behavior is fascinating and being able to understand how to get your dog to repeat desired behaviors through reinforcement is a skill. Owners that want their dog to listen just because they should, can consider other factors. There is always a reason behind behavior even if it is not always obvious.

While the idea of having a dog listen just because *they should* might seem magical, it hardly seems fair or logical. Using food reinforcement wisely can turn a training plan around. If an owner dreams of a dog that listens just because they should, they can consider why they believe that's important and what other things are going on that drive behavior.

Owners can train with food even if the goal is to be able to get the same behavior from their dog without it, such as during obedience competitions. It's great to have this goal but it should not be confused with the belief that food should never be used.

Remember, with correct use, food is not going to cause a dog to *only* listen when the treats are being dangled in front of his nose.

Puppy owners will find that they can train lovely behaviors with low latency when using food in training properly. Puppies do not have to be treated for every correct response nor should they be

treated for everything. An experienced training coach can help owners develop the eye for when and how to deliver food reinforcement.

Food is not only acceptable to use in training, but it is also very helpful when used skillfully.

What are Treats, Bait, Lures, and Food?

What's the difference between treats, food, bait, and lures? The definitions vary depending on whom you ask which is why we are going to briefly define each in order to clarify which is being referred to. While all of these involve some type of food (excluding following a target for a food-free "lure" technique for the purpose of this guide), not all are used in the same way.

Treats versus Food: In many cases, these words are used interchangeably. Some owners prefer to use the term treat while others use the term food. Many pet owners will also consider treats to be a goodie given outside of training. In this guide, we will refer to the food that the dog finds reinforcing used in training as food from this point on. Treats might also give owners the idea that the only food which can be used in training are the typical store-bought training treats. This is limiting as there are many other options to also consider.

Bait: This term is more commonly used around the show ring and handling classes versus pet dog training. Bait is exactly what it sounds like. It is used to get expression, interest, or engagement from a dog. The dog will be reinforced with bites, nibbles, and licks of the bait. The bait is often shown to the dog. This differs from the training definition of luring, Bait is not generally phased out the way luring is, although this may vary greatly depending on the person or handler.

Lure: Sometimes the easiest and quickest way to get a dog to move in the way required for a new skill is to use luring. Luring is an art that takes practice. There are rules in place to ensure the dog is polite while following a lure. A skilled trainer can move a dog through many positions with a lure. The lure is removed through one of several techniques and replaced with a cue or signal. Luring is a technique often used in pet classes. When done correctly, luring is an excellent skill to master with lovely results. Shaking a bag of treats to get your dog to come inside is NOT luring. Flowing through

a go-out and circle into a flip to heel position with your dog's nose following your hand smoothly IS luring.

How to use Food in Puppy Training and FAQ

Food is easy to deliver and carry which gives it the potential to be an excellent reinforcer, but there are a few rules for using it in training that must be followed in order for it to be helpful.

Food Size and Texture:

The size of the food will usually be about the size of your fingernail with exceptions. It may be smaller or larger depending on the dog's size. Larger chunks might also be used to surprise the dog. Avoid large biscuits that make a crummy mess. Have you ever tried looking up while eating a graham cracker without a drink? That's essentially what you're asking your dog to do when you are feeding a biscuit and moving through behaviors while asking for attention. Soft foods tend to work well although kibble can work too. Food that takes too long to chew is best avoided.

Smelly Treats

Although you might not enjoy the smell of dog food, dogs appreciate strong smelling foods.

Praise and Play Should be a Required Given

Owners who are using food in training should take care not to forget other types of reinforcement. You should always mix in other types of reinforcement. Learn how to use play and praise in training in addition to food for the best results. It's worth mentioning many more times throughout this guide that variety is important.

Use High-Value (HV) Food Wisely:

Some types of foods are more desirable than others, but it's up to the dog to make this decision. Never assume a treat labeled as high-value is going to be high value for the dog in front of you. It is up to the dog to decide. Value is determined not just by the type of food and the dog's taste for it but by the frequency of this food being used, the way it is delivered as well as other factors.

Consider using just one or two high-value food items within a short session of practicing simple behaviors. Surprise the dog with high-value food for excellent responses. You do not have to offer the best food for every response nor do you have to feed after every response when working on maintaining behaviors such as basic obedience. Owners concerned about using food due to their puppies being sensitive to the traditional treats should keep in mind that food can still be used very successfully when used strategically even in moderation.

In difficult environments, the food should be of higher value than in the living room. This is also true for training new behaviors or working through things that are the most important at that time.

You can use high-value food more often than explained above as long as you offer variety. The same HV item offered repetitively has the potential of losing value sooner rather than later.

High-value food should not be unhealthy. Just because it's delicious to the dog, doesn't mean it is unhealthy. A bit of meat, a lick of wet dog food off of a cooking spoon (designated for training only), or a taste of salmon are a few examples. Remember, you *do not* have to feed high-value food every single time your puppy gets something right.

Owners can match the HV food to the ingredients with their dog's kibble if the dog has sensitivities or restrictions. If the dog can only eat selected meats, make some up for training time. A very tiny amount is all that is needed when training sessions are planned and reinforcement is timed right.

Delivery of the HV food is also important. Consider placing the food somewhere away from you and surprising your dog by running over to it at just the right time (after an amazing response to a cue, for example). When the food is on you, you can still surprise your dog with the timing (which response the HV follows) and deliver the food quickly to your dog.

Change where the food comes from even while it is on you. Clip your treat bag up high or at your shoe. Add variety in the way you do things to prevent bad habits from developing such as keeping your hand in your treat bag all too often.

Feeding your dog directly to the mouth or doing a "search," and tossing it, or a catch game are all reasonable options. Goals should be considered when it comes to delivering the food. Does the behavior require more energy and bounce or a calmer feel to it? Is there a place the dog should land to be set up for offering the next behavior?

Feeding the dog a few pieces in a row with excitement (jackpot) or offering a scatter of food by dropping more than one piece are additional options for powerful delivery techniques that can be used occasionally.

While many foods that are high-value can be used more often than explained here depending on the session goals, the goal of this guide is to consider options for puppies that might be sensitive to new foods. The key takeaway is to focus on the strategic use of the food and variety in both what is used and how it is delivered.

Rethinking Low-Value Food

Low-value food usually refers to something that the dog will still work for but that is much less interesting to the dog. Low-value food can be powerful just like higher-value foods. When discussing low-value food it's important to consider if the food makes a behavior more likely to happen or not. If you are training your dog, does offering the low-value food in question still drive the session forward? Is the dog repeating behaviors that are being reinforced (or the owner is attempting to reinforce)? If the dog is repeating behaviors reinforced with the low-value food, then it's working just fine. This doesn't mean it's acceptable to slip into being dull with it. There is an art to using the lower-value food properly.

It's important that growing puppies are receiving proper nutrition through a balanced diet. A puppy filling up on store-bought treats and intaking less of their balanced food than what is needed is concerning. While we might assume using kibble to train a puppy is not going to do the job since they get their kibble for free anyways, that is not true! Training with food should never throw off the nutritional balance.

Owners can use a puppy's recommended dog food for training time by measuring it and enhancing it. The same rules about variety hold true when it comes to training with puppy kibble. Owners should have some unpredictability in the way they deliver the reinforcement as well as in the flavor of the enhanced kibble. The food should be broken up with games (strategic use of play in training) and praise.

An Important Note About the Dangers of Restricting Food

While training a puppy with kibble after a full meal might not be very helpful, restricting food is also a terrible idea. You might choose to hold off on dinner until after a training class or use measured portions of your dog's food for training time, but you should not skip meals in order to make your puppy overly hungry for training purposes.

Follow the recommendation for the amount and feeding schedule for your breed of dog (or size and energy level) and make it work with your training schedule. You can train at feeding time, replace food bowls with enrichment games, and work out the right amounts to dedicate to training in order to keep your puppies' diet balanced, but you should not attempt to restrict food intake in order to make your puppy more food driven. You can keep your puppy on a structured feeding schedule and still train with kibble.

Is Training with Food Ever Unethical?

While training with food is usually harmless, there are situations that can bring up ethical concerns. It's important to pay close attention to a dog's behavior no matter what the reinforcement plan looks like. Be careful you are not reinforcing a behavior that is uncomfortable for a dog. If an owner believes a dog is sore, injured, or off for any reason, they should not reinforce the behaviors which are uncomfortable at that time.

As mentioned, food is never to be restricted to make an animal hungry. Restricting food is very different from timing sessions and measuring proportions.

Food can cause stress for a number of other reasons in very specific cases which are another topic altogether. The point of this section is to point out that there are cases where training with food requires special precautions. It's also important to consider that poor timing in delivery, changing methods or rules on the dog as well as other factors can cause stress and even learned helplessness.

Just because a trainer uses food, does not mean they are using it correctly or not using it in conjunction with outdated or unethical methods. This should all be considered by pet owners seeking professional training.

Timing

Food should be delivered quickly after the desired behavior happens whether or not the owner is using a marker such as a clicker while training new behaviors. If the food is delivered too late, consider the correct response forgotten. This guide is not intended to cover training techniques in depth, but it's important to understand that timing is very important when using food in training.

Enhanced Kibble

Enhanced kibble can be the perfect solution for training puppies without throwing off their nutrition or upsetting their bellies. While it is beneficial to use some delicious HV food items in addition to this, using enhanced kibble will work well for regular practice sessions.

Food that smells delicious and up with fun delivery and other types of reinforcement works well for puppies. The same kibble that puppies eat for their meals can be transformed.

Kibble can be enhanced in a variety of ways. Owners can mix their puppies' kibble with a bit of boiled chicken for training time in a bag so that the food has a stronger smell. Store bought dog food

toppers can be used sparingly to give the food new flavor. By mixing a chunk of yummy food in a container with the kibble, the kibble takes on a new smell and taste. The enhanced foods can be mixed up often to maintain variety. There are endless options to enhance kibble.

Owners should discard leftover kibble that has been enhanced with something perishable or plan to use it all within a session.

What About Puppies that Aren't on Kibble?

Not all puppies eat kibble. Puppies on fresh or wet food types can still have bits of their food at training time. Although messy, food can be delivered on a lick spoon or in a squeezable tube. The idea is that owners use food which the puppy is already used to having for training to avoid stomach upset.

Conclusion

Training with food has its many benefits. Pet owners should take the time to learn how to train with food for the best results.

Using food with puppies should never throw off diets or upset bellies with the many options available for safe food use such as using the same food the puppy eats every day with a bit of new flavor and smell to it.

There are always ways to problem solve around the concerns that arise when it comes to puppy training. Puppy owners can have fun training their puppies while having one less thing to worry about with what they learn in this guide. You can train with food successfully even if your puppy is not ready to try all of the latest treats.

For more training resources, lesson booking in person and online or to share your questions or thoughts about this guide with the author visit www.mjspettrainingacademy.com.

Contact:

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/melissa-j-viera>

Instagram: @mjspetacademy

Email: Info@mjspettrainingacademy.com

Training Services: mjspettrainingacademy.com

Available Puppies: PalladiumPoodles.com

PALLADIUM
POODLES



Learn about the use of food in dog training and how to safely use food reinforcement without causing stomach upset, adding unnecessary calories, or throwing off diets.

Correct Use of Food

Kibble enhancement

Ethical Considerations

Misconceptions

Other Types of Reinforcement

Food Motivation Levels no

This guide discusses the use of food in training, from correct use to ethical considerations, as well how to safely use food without throwing off a balanced diet.