

# Dog: KONG Stuffing



Dogs are genetically programmed to hunt for their food. A prime reason for behavior problems is that, unlike working dogs, companion dogs get so few mental challenges or tasks to solve. We give our dogs their food for free. Instead, mimic nature by making your dog solve a problem: How to get to his food.

## **KONG-Stuffing Pointers**

Many people's KONG®-stuffing efforts never go beyond a few dog cookies or kibble. But this merely scratches the surface of the creative food-acquisition challenges you can create for your dog. KONG toys can be easy or difficult food problems. Match the KONG complexity to your dog's level of experience and temperament. Is he the persevering kind or does he give up quickly?

Whichever level you start at, increase the difficulty gradually, so that your dog succeeds while developing perseverance. In other words, start easy and then make it tougher. Here's how to bump your KONG-stuffing prowess up to the next level:

**For easy KONG stuffings**, use small, easy-to-fall-out pieces and pack them loosely.

**For more difficult KONG stuffings**, use some big pieces that take concerted effort and hole-squishing to get in (and thus will be difficult to extract) and pack the pieces tighter.

- Use a matrix (peanut butter, cream cheese, canned food, baby food) to hold in the smaller bits.
- Wrap a stuffed KONG in a clean rag and enclose it in an old margarine or other container (try Quaker oatmeal cardboard containers) to increase the level of difficulty through "nesting."
- Hide regular stuffed or nested KONG toys around the house so your dog gets to hunt around to find them before unpacking them.
- Give your dog all his food this way, especially if he's a high-energy dog.
- Stuff meat, mashed potatoes etc. in the KONG and freeze it. Alternatively, plug the small hole with peanut butter and fill the cavity with broth, then freeze this to make a "Kongsicle." (This can be messy; it is best to give it to your dog outside.)
- Stuff cheese cubes in the KONG, then briefly microwave it to coat the insides.

**Tip:** Clean your KONG toys regularly with a bottlebrush or in the dishwasher.

## **A KONG-Stuffing Recipe**

**Layer 1:** Roasted unsalted cashews, freeze-dried liver bits.

**Layer 2:** Dog kibble, cookies or Liver Biscotti, Cheerios, sugar-free / salt-free peanut butter, dried banana chips.

**Layer 3:** Baby carrot stick(s), turkey and / or leftover ravioli or tortellini, dried apples, dried apricots.

Pack everything as tightly as possible. The last item in should be a dried apricot or piece of ravioli, presenting a smooth finish under the main hole. Bon appétit!

A lower-calorie version:

For cashews, substitute crumbled rice cake. For freeze-dried liver, substitute Caesar croutons.

For peanut butter substitute fat-free cream cheese.