

Begging..."OH! OH! Gimme so of THAT!"

Training Tips

Don't reward undesirable behavior. Begging can be addictive because dogs win the double jackpot of getting both food and attention if they succeed. You – and everyone who eats near your dog -- will need to be utterly consistent in refusing to give her either reward while she's in the act of begging.

Give your dog a job. If your dog knows the basic commands, tell her to “down” and “stay” while you're eating. This is her new job, and how she earns a food treat. If she doesn't know these commands, some basic training is in order. When you start the “down-stay” training, reward her with a dog treat after just a few seconds of her remaining where you want her. Gradually increase the duration of the “down-stay” until it can last through a meal.

Go cold turkey on the people food. While you train her not to beg, feed your dog only dog food – even in her dish. She needs to learn the difference between dog food and people food so she'll stop requesting the wrong thing. During this period, give her dog treats only for responding to a command like “down-stay” – but not during your mealtimes.

Give your dog a place of her own. Teach her to go to a special place while you eat. Offer her a comfy bed in the corner of the room with her own chews or toys. Initially, you can combine this with crate training or tether training in order to keep her there. Once she's learned that the only way to get a food treat is to wait quietly in her place, she'll be happy to go there when asked.

Feed your dog before you eat or on a random schedule. If you feed her before you and your family sit down to a meal, she may not be as interested in begging. You could also feed her at unpredictable times so she doesn't start begging in anticipation. If she begs for snacks, work with her on “down-stay.”

Establish cleanup rules. If your dog is lucky enough to score scraps that fall off the table, you can allow it as long as she follows the rules: Make her “sit” or “down-stay” before you let her eat what dropped. When she's finished, send her back to the place where she's expected to “down-stay” during your meals.

Hang tough. Most of us find it difficult to stop dispensing food treats to an adored dog who's panting with anticipation. If you give in, she may beg even more insistently for a while, since she'll think you've forgotten your job. Just go back to being firm. The good news is you can still give her a doggy treat if she earns it.

Tools You Can Use

A vet visit. If your dog is underweight or overweight, or if you have questions about her health, it's better to be safe than sorry. Ask your vet to check for any physical problem that might explain her persistence in begging for food. A fecal test can rule out the possibility of intestinal parasites.

A high-quality diet. When you start training your dog not to beg, make sure that her diet fully meets her nutritional needs. Ask your veterinarian for a recommendation.

Doggy treats. Experiment with different dog treats until you find a couple your dog is crazy about. Use these to reward good behavior. Never give them for begging.

Food puzzles. A food-yielding toy like a Kong or Buster Cube filled with treats can distract your dog when you're enjoying a meal.

Chews. Give your dog something entertainingly chewy at times when she normally begs. Start the “chew spectrum” with easily edible chews and gradually work toward longer-lasting chews. Make sure they are too big for her to swallow and not so hard she might break a tooth. Rather than simply disciplining her for begging, this method lets you give her positive alternatives.