

RESOURCE GUARDING IN HOUNDS:

It is in a dog's nature to protect food and other resources. It is not uncommon in dogs, especially hounds. There is nothing wrong with your dog-other than being a dog. So your dog is a resource guarder...take a breath, stay calm, your dog is not broken, you can fix this. There are a few important first steps when trying to manage life with a food protective dog.

The first thing I want to cover is the training itself, or actually taking advice from others on training your dog. Regardless of who or where advice comes from (*including us*) it is important to remember that training, like nothing else in this world regarding your dog, is fraught with differing opinions and approaches. There is no one way to cure a dog of resource guarding. There are some who would have you believe that there is just one (*or a few*) methods of training and, quite amazingly, they know its secret. As with obedience training there are a few simple rules to follow. Dogs do not fail training. People fail at training their dogs. Failure comes through either having chose the wrong method for themselves and the dog (*usually because someone else convinced them that the only way to train the dog was with their way*) or through inconsistencies in the use of training methods.

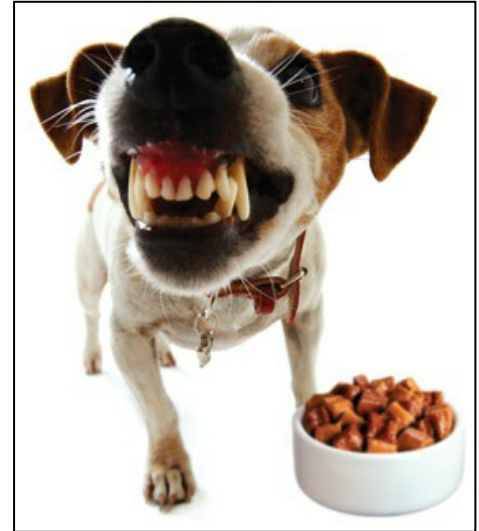
Your dog, much like you, is an individual. Your dog might not respond to the same training method as other dogs of its breed or even respond to the same method as its siblings. You know your dog and yourself better than does any trainer or self-proclaimed expert. The advice of others is often necessary, but do not treat it as the gospel. Perhaps the first and foremost step in training your dog is confidence in what you are doing and belief in the method/tools. If you are not comfortable using the methods/tools offered by a trainer, you will not perform those actions or use the tools with the consistency and confidence

to make them believable to your dog. It really is just (*about*) that simple.

Many people will try to convince you that [this] or [that] method is the only way a dog should or can be trained. They are wrong. If what you have tried does not work, try something else. Dogs will learn. They always learn (*barring mental defect or illness*), just some dogs take a few tries to find the way in which they learn best.

Second, when training a resource guarding dog, ALWAYS keep your safety and your families safety in the fore front of your mind. Follow your gut. If something you are doing feels "risky" or makes you uncomfortable, search for other options.

With that...lets get to the nitty gritty.



How big is your resource guarding problem?

Over the years, I have read literally hundreds of articles about resource guarding and this first, very important, step seems to be missing from many. Resource guarding in dogs can range from an occasional mild nuisance behavior up to and including outright dangerous behavior. Dogs can exhibit the occasional "cold, deadly stare" when someone approaches a special treat/bone/toy or they can viciously attack anyone and anything that comes within their reach when enjoying the regular evening meal. These two very different situations will require being handled in two different ways. I think it is of the utmost importance to first classify your dogs guarding behaviors. I classify them in this way:

1. The Opportunist: Dogs who generally show little to no signs of resource guarding or sensitivity around normal every day food products, treats, or toys but will vehemently defend any "special item" (*typically things they have gotten for them selves...like food dropped from the table or the garbage can they just tipped over*).
2. The Brat: Dogs who typically only exhibit resource behaviors when enjoying specific items you have provided for them like rawhides, toys, or treats but not with normal every day meals etc. These dogs whom are essentially telling you (*like a 2 year old child*) MINE!!!!
3. The Selective Guarder: Dogs who exhibit guarding behaviors like those above but typically only with certain household members.
4. The "Schoolyard Bully": Dogs who exhibit guarding behaviors with other dogs/animals in the house but not with humans.
5. The Liberal Guarder: Dogs who quite freely tell anyone and anything to keep away from nearly anything they deem important, though typically prefer grandstanding and warnings over out and out aggression and dangerous behavior
6. Kujo: Dogs who exhibit dangerous behaviors, growling, snapping, biting, and other severe behavior.

Some dogs will fit, very specifically into one of these 6 categories. Your dog might be the epitome of the "Schoolyard Bully". A dog might also exhibit behaviors from more than one of these categories. Your dog might be an "Opportunist Brat" or a "Selective Liberal". Wherever your dog falls in the spectrum, it is important to first get a grasp on the how, when, and where of your dog's behaviors.

For the sake of brevity, I am going to cover the last two types of guarding behaviors. For the "Kujo" guarder (*especially*) and the Liberal guarder it is likely best you do not try to manage the training of these dogs without professional guidance. The Kujo Guarder is dangerous. Do not risk your or your families well being trying to manage this manner of dog on your own. The Liberal Guarder can become a Kujo Guarder is handled improperly, so again, for this dog we suggest professional intervention and advice. While some of the methods used for the other types of guarding behaviors will also apply to the Liberal and Kujo Guarder, we do not suggest you go about training these dogs on your own.

(Truthfully, and guarding behavior can morph into worsening behaviors when handled incorrectly. So be watchful for changes in your dog's behavior as you train.)

General Advice:

It is our belief that any training you try will be more successful if your dog has some basic obedience skills. If your dog does not know basic commands or have never been through obedience training, strongly consider these basics. Obedience class/training is important to all other training efforts in the same way that arithmetic is important to algebra. It is very difficult to learn algebra without first knowing the basics of $2+2$.

With that said, the first thing to remember when training a resource-guarding dog is never be forceful, physical, or in any way threatening to the dog. Force will be met with equal and opposite (*or escalating levels of*) force. Do not physically remove the dog from a guarding situation by either the dog's collar or other means. Do not forcibly remove items being guarded. Calm, even, planned response to your dog's guarding behaviors will be the only long term effective solution.

Use those things your dog does not guard to your advantage. If your dogs does not guard treats, but does guard rawhides...use the dogs ease with treats to teach your dog ease with rawhide. Dogs are efficient learners. What you teach them with about one thing, they will freely transfer to other things in their lives. Take the time to teach your dog the "leave it", or "drop it" commands with those things he/she has no tendency to guard. This training will help build the basic understanding of these commands. This understanding will build the foundation necessary to teach the dog how to leave those things he/she guards without stress. Do not expect that because you just trained your dog to "leave it" in regard to your sock that this will immediately transfer to its guarding behavior with bones. Teaching the dog these commands are more an effort to build the foundation necessary for other training.

Solve for x:
 $(-3) + (-7) = x$
 $-3 - 7 = x$

The last thing you must keep in mind is that resource guarding will take time and diligence to correct. Be patient. There is no "quick cure" and some dogs are never "cured", only made more manageable. Be patient and take the time needed.

The Avoidance technique:

This is not actually a solution nor is it training. However, it is the easiest to explain. Avoidance is exactly what the name infers. Simply avoid placing your dog into situations where resource guarding becomes an issue. I will use our own Bluetick Coonhound, Ranger, as an example. Ranger does not like other animals around his food. *(so Ranger would be a Schoolyard Bully)* He will freely let my wife, I, even a complete stranger take his food. Other animals are not treated with such patience. In fact, Ranger was originally turned into the shelter for having killed the family Goat, presumably in a disagreement over food. We feed our dogs in their crates as normal practice *(so while we never actually chose to use the avoidance technique, this is still an example of avoidance)*. Since Ranger is in his crate his protectiveness of his food resource is rarely if ever displayed. This "method" can be used for a variety of guarding behaviors. Simply remove the dog or the situation in which the resource guarding becomes an issue. Be it by feeding them in a separate room, or giving them their toys or treats in some controlled or private manner, this is not actually training, nor is it a preferred long term method, but can be used while other training efforts are ongoing. In fact, reducing the stressors that cause guarding behaviors in the first place is a good place to start an important second step in training...



Desensitization:

The desensitization process takes time, patience, and planning. I will again use one of our rescues as an example. We had a small female Beagle come through the rescue a few years back who would tear into anyone that came near her while she was eating. Dogs and people alike were subject to her wrath. We began desensitizing her by feeding her in a calm, private environment ...our spare room *(with the door closed)*. We set her bowl on the ground and let her see it was empty. She would of course give us that "what the heck?" look. We would then reach into the food bag, feed her a few kibble from our hand. After this we would place a handful of kibble in the bowl at a time, always being sure she was aware that this kibble came from us. In just a few days, she was quite willing to let us sit beside her while we performed this practice and while she ate. We then next moved on to *(once we were comfortable we would still have all our fingers)* leaving our hand in contact with the bowl after placing the kibble in it. Once she seemed okay with this, we then moved to filling her bowl entirely and sitting beside her while she ate. We had a few backwards steps here. At some point, you will likely have a few steps back toward unwanted behavior as well, so expect them. We had to return to dolling out small portions at a time. She did eventually allow us to sit beside her while she ate...then she allowed our hand on the bowl while she ate...then to be petting her while she ate...and so on and so forth until she no longer cared if we were around when she was eating. *(This process took about 1 month to complete)*.

How you divide this training and the actual actions you choose are going to be your own decisions. Your level of comfort and the intensity of the dog's behaviors will dictate these steps. For instance, you may need to start on the other side of the room, which will mean you will have many more steps between the start and finish of this training. The basic idea is to develop a plan with which you teach your dog that you and others are not a threat to their resources and that you are in fact the source of those resources.

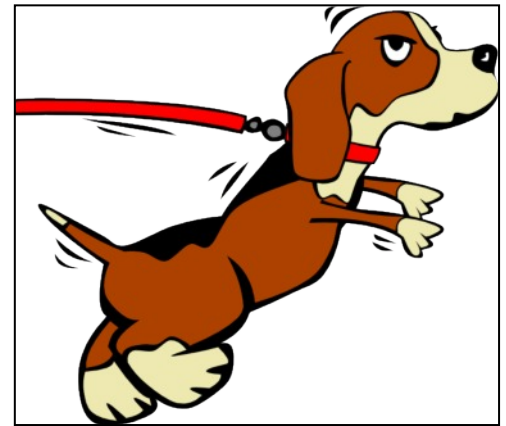
Dog to dog resource guarding is somewhat more complex.

We start this training with the crate. We place the dog known for guarding behaviors in a crate with their meal/treat and another dog within eyesight of the crated dog (*but far enough away that the guarding behavior is not triggered*). We will slowly move the bowl/treat giving closer and closer to the crated dog and that dog becomes comfortable with the other dogs presence. Once the guarding dog is comfortable with another dog 6 feet away, we will move to 5 feet away, and then 4 and so on. Once we are comfortable with the dogs behaviors we will return to a safe distance and practice this slow approach method with the crate door open. Again, once we are comfortable with the dogs behaviors we will move to a safe distance, remove the crate from the training, and approach in small steps until the dogs can eat in close proximity without acting out.

Dogs whom are treat guarding, but not usually food guarding add another layer of complexity. The basic idea here is to recondition your guarding dog to think that the other dog(s) are actually the source of his good fortune. Choose whatever treat your dogs find special. Use these treats only when training, do not give them in any other scenario. Find some other treat for basic treat giving.

Separate the dogs by some distance you feel is safe and will likely hold the least possibility of either dog acting out. The ideal would be for one dog to be REALLY good at sit and stay, but if your dog(s) are no good at this, a leash or tether is your fall back. If one dog is not prone to guarding behaviors, it is okay to have this dog loose so long as you are able to keep this dog from approaching the dog with the guarding issue. If this is not possible, you may need to tie one dog to something solid and hold the other, or involve other family members in your training to keep the dogs at a safe distance. Start by giving the non guarding dog a treat, immediately followed by excited and friendly talk to the guarding dog while giving him or her their treat.

The idea is to convince the dog with guarding behaviors that, because the first dog got a treat, they also got a treat. The first dog is the source of their good fortune. Over the subsequent days, as the dogs are more comfortable, perform this with the dogs closer to each other until you get to the point where they can be near each other without incident. Once this is achieved, return to a safe distance (*through all of your training thus far it will behoove you to also be teaching your dog sit and stay*) and carefully repeat the process with the dogs unrestrained.



Dogs who guard items like toys, couches, beds, or even people from other dogs and people are where our thinking takes a bit of a reversal. The key to these behaviors is as much management of the problem as it is training. Dogs who protect toys/couches/beds etc, quite plainly, should not have free access to these items. Where as with other guarding behaviors we were intentionally introducing the source of the guarding behavior in a controlled manner, here we are removing those items. While you are free to try variations of the above treat technique to desensitize a dog to the proximity of others to things like toys, we have not had as much success with this as we would like. A dog who guards the couch is in our home handled one of two ways:

1. That dog is immediately asked made to get off the couch. The key here is immediately ...the second a growl/snarl/snap/ or cold stare happens. Your reaction must be directly linked to the dogs bad behavior in the dogs mind.
2. The dog is not allowed on the couch/bed/etc that they protect at all. The no access method is especially useful for dogs who have threatened harm or behaved dangerously.

Toys are the complication with this practice. However, we have found that for protective dogs simply not leaving toys where they have free access greatly inhibits their protective behaviors. They are allowed toys only in a supervised playtime where we are present and in control of the both the toy and the play. While it seems that completely removing a dog's access to things like couches and beds seems contradictory to our previous training, actually we are not removing those items. Your couch will always be in your living room. Your bed will always be in your bedroom. There is no way to remove these items from the dog's life. There is no way for us to control how these items are introduced to the dog (*not in the manner we can food and treats*). These items are not the same as the occasional introduction of food from the cabinet or treats from the jar (*which are for most of the day out of sight and out of mind for the dog*) so instead, we must control how they are viewed by the dog. The dog must learn to view these items not as theirs to be guarded, but as yours to be given. I know this seems like it would surely increase the guarding behaviors, but keep in mind that anytime the dog is allowed on the couch, to have a toy, or on the bed, you are right there supervising and controlling how this resource is used and managed by the dog.

I hope the basics get you started. I encourage you to do some reading on resource guarding. The choice of methods and ideas about guarding are almost endless. As with any training, most important is that you choose a method that you are most comfortable performing. Read up on any of the myriad of techniques and choose what you feel is best for you and your dog. Resource guarding, while manageable, might never be entirely cured. Dogs who have exhibited guarding behaviors in the past could well exhibit them again in the future regardless of your training efforts...so diligence and supervision, coupled with the occasional "refresher course" will be the best way for long term peace in your home.

D.E Lee

HoundSong Rescue