

Homeward Bound Golden Retriever Rescue

Golden Rule Training

Teach Your Dog to Play Fetch

Teaching your dog a few simple tricks is fun and entertaining for both you and your dog. It is best if your dog knows and reliably responds to the basic obedience commands of sit, stay and down before teaching him to perform tricks, such as "Fetch." Most tricks are built on basic obedience work anyway and in the process of being taught "the basics," your dog will have learned to pay attention to you during training sessions.

If your dog has an orthopedic problem, check with your veterinarian before proceeding with more advanced training. Even relatively simple tricks can place unnecessary stress on bones and joints that are in any way compromised.

The success of training of your dog hinges on rewarding the desired behavioral response in a timely fashion. The most valued rewards differ from dog to dog: For some, food it is the most powerful reward, for others, praise or petting are what they crave.

Basic Steps:

First, find your dog's favorite toy to start the Fetch game (condensed version).

1. Throw the first ball and let your dog go after it. When your dog starts to come towards you, ask your dog to "drop it."
2. If your dog does not drop the ball, stop paying any attention to your dog and take out the second ball.
3. Start to have fun with the second ball, toss it up in the air and continue to have a great time with the second ball. Keep doing this until your dog looks at you. Your dog should show interest and will drop the ball that he/she has and look up at the one you have.
4. As soon as your dog drops his/her ball, show the ball you are holding to your dog. As soon as your dog focuses on the ball that you are holding, throw it.
5. If your dog brings the toy back but will not let you have it, say, "Drop it," and then put a tasty treat right in front of his nose. Few dogs can resist that, so he will probably drop the toy.
6. Repeat the process when your dog comes back to you. Within a short period, you will have your dog retrieving for you.
7. At this point, add the cue "Fetch".

The key to success is patience, praise and consistency. Every time your dog makes a step in the right direction, (even if they do not complete the cue) they receive a reward. Make this time you spend teaching tricks fun for both you and your dog!

Toys for Fetch

- Retriever plastic or rubber bumper
- Air KONG® squeaker tennis ball
- Soft Bite Floppy Disc® or the BOODA® Flyer™
- KONG Flyer (made of soft, flexible rubber) Hyperflite® Jawz™ Disc (semi-flexible plastic Frisbee made specifically for disc dog competitions), SoFlite™ Disc (extra-soft for sensitive mouths) or FrostBite™ Disc (stays soft and flexible in cold weather)
- KONG Toy (comes with or without a rope attached)
- Chuckit!® Flying Squirrel fetch toy (also comes in a plush form)
- Planet Dog Orbee-Tuff® Orbee Ball
- And of course, the tennis ball

The Reluctant Retriever

For dogs who do not grasp the concept of chasing after toys at all, you need to start with the basics. For instance, if your dog likes to play tug-of-war, teach him to go get a fetch toy so that you can play tug with it. Start by playing a short game of tug with a soft toy that your dog likes. Then take the toy from his mouth, tease him a bit by wiggling it on the ground, and toss it just a few inches away.

If your dog runs to the toy, immediately snatch it up and start another fun game of tug. If he just stands there and looks at the toy, wiggle it around on the floor again until he finds it irresistible. As soon as he goes for it, toss it another few inches away. Continue doing this until your dog chases after the toy. When he does, you can reward him with another quick tug game. Soon he will reliably chase the toy when you toss it, and you can start throwing it greater distances.

Encourage your dog to come back to you by reaching for the toy in his mouth and tugging on it. When he gets the idea that bringing the toy back to you leads to a tugging battle, he will be eager to run and fetch the toy. Once you start throwing it a few feet, it is helpful to turn and run away as your dog comes toward you with the toy. This will encourage him to run faster and chase you. When he catches up to you, play tug with the toy. Eventually, you will not have to play tug every single time your dog fetches the toy, but be sure to do so intermittently to keep him eager to play.

If your dog likes treats, you can teach him to fetch a toy for the promise of a good treat. Show him the toy and toss it a few inches away. Even if he only watches the toy at first, praise him and give him a treat.

After three or four repetitions of this, encourage him to chase after the toy. As he takes a step or two toward it, praise and give him a treat, repeat this three or four times.

Next, toss the toy and see if he will sniff it or put his mouth on it. If he does not, touch it yourself and wiggle it a bit. The instant your dog moves toward the toy, praise and reward him with a treat. Ask for a little bit more from him each time, until he is actually picking up the toy. When he does, really make it a big deal by using praise, and give him a small handful of treats. At this point, he will think that the toy is interesting, so try tossing it farther.

Encourage him to come back to you when he has the toy in his mouth. Some dogs have to learn that they can actually walk and hold something at the same time, so be patient. If your dog drops the toy, say, "Eh-eh, get the toy," and point to it. He will figure out that the only way to earn his reward is to bring the toy to you, so he will stop dropping it or he will go back and get it when he does drop it.

Once your dog learns the fetch game, he might enjoy it enough that you will not need to give him treats each time he brings the toy back, but in the beginning, be sure to praise and reward him for every fetch. Then wean him off the treats, the reward becomes playing fetch!

The Bait-and-Switch Game

If your dog loves to chase and pick up the fetch toy but is not keen on bringing it back to you, try the bait-and-switch game with two identical toys.

Show your dog one of the toys and throw it, and encourage him to fetch it. When he picks it up, call him, then show him the other toy, and act as though you are going to throw it in the opposite direction. He will probably drop the first toy and come running to chase after the second one.

While he is chasing the second toy, pick up the first toy and repeat the sequence. This exercise will get your dog used to picking up a toy and turning to run back to you.

Next, call your dog when he picks up the first toy, but do not show him the second one right away (hide it behind your back). He should turn and run back to you while still holding the first toy in his mouth. When he gets close to you, say, "Drop it." Then show him the second toy. He will drop the first toy in order to chase after the second one. Now you will not have to walk so far to pick up the toy he drops.

This game will be easy for your dog to learn and can really tire him out. Eventually, your dog will probably figure out that he has to release the ball/toy he has when you say, "Drop it." At this point, you can try picking up the ball/toy he dropped and throw it again. This final step will eliminate the need for a second ball.

More Tips for Playing Fetch

- Once your dog is happily running after the toy, try holding him back by the collar while you throw it. Tempt him by saying, "Oh, do you want it? Are you going to get that ball?" When he seems eager to go after the toy, excitedly say, "Okay, get it!" and let go of his collar. The extra bit of frustration he feels when you hold him back will encourage him to be even more enthusiastic about going after the toy when you finally release him.
- If your dog goes after the toy quickly but comes back to you slowly, call him and run away from him at the exact moment he picks up the ball. Dogs love to chase, and he probably will not be able to resist running after you. Praise him when he catches up to you. If you consistently do this for a few weeks, your dog will come back faster, even when you do not run.
- If your dog likes to play "catch-me-if-you-can" with the fetch toy, or if he simply prefers to go off with it and play by himself, attach a light leash or rope to the toy. Throw it, and when he picks it up wiggle the line and run off in the opposite direction, at the same

time, encouraging him to chase you. If he follows after you with the toy, praise him and play a little game of tug or give him a treat. If he drops the toy, drag it behind you so that he can chase it. If he still tries to run away with the toy, pull on the line and reel him in. Praise and reward him when he gets close to you. Sometimes, throw the toy again quickly. Other times, let him keep the toy for a few minutes; he will not learn that every time he comes to you, you take his toy away. If you consistently play with a toy on a rope for a few weeks, your dog will stop trying to take off with the toy.

- If your dog brings the toy back but will not let you have it, say, "Drop it," and then put a tasty treat right in front of his nose. Few dogs can resist that, so he will probably spit the toy out. (If he does not, try using a more exciting treat, like a small piece of cheese or chicken.) When your dog drops the toy, praise him and give him the treat. After a few repetitions, he will learn to drop the toy when you ask him to. Eventually, you will not have to give your dog a treat every time he drops the toy. Throwing the toy for him again might be enough of a reward. However, be sure to give your dog a tasty tidbit occasionally to keep him eager to release the toy when you say, "Drop it."
- If your dog returns with the toy but spits it out on the ground a few feet away, you can teach him to bring it all the way in to you. Watch him coming toward you. Just *before* he reaches the point where he is likely to drop the toy, say, "Bring it," and wave him in with your arm while you walk a few feet in the opposite direction. When he sees you moving away, he will keep following you. When he reaches the spot where you were standing, turn and walk back to him. Tell him, "Drop it." He will release the toy and back up. Praise him and throw the toy. If you do this consistently for a few weeks, your dog will learn the meaning of "Bring it," and you can remind him as he is coming in to bring the toy all the way to you.
- If you want your dog to put the toy in your hand and he had rather spit it on the ground, you can teach him to "Give it" to your hand. Before your dog has a chance to drop the toy, place your hand, palm up, underneath his jaw and say, "Give it." When he drops the toy, catch it. Praise him and throw it again right away to reward him. Do this consistently for a few days. Then test your dog by saying, "Give it" and holding your hand out, palm up, *in front* of his mouth. If he reaches forward to drop the toy into your hand, praise him profusely and throw the toy again. If he drops it on the ground, say, "Uh-uh, give it," and keep your hand in place. Wiggle your fingers while you say, "Give it" to show your dog that you want the toy in your hand.

Stick to these rules every time you play fetch with your dog. Eventually, you will be able to pick up the toy while your dog waits politely.

Sources:

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Teaching Your Dog to "Fetch" By: Dr. Amy Wolff
ASPCA.com