

# FOOD GLORIOUS FOOD OR IS IT? REDUCING FOOD

TRAINING TIP COURTESY OF SUE HOGBEN

Many thanks to Sue for allowing us to reproduce this article which she wrote as part of the recent Obedience Nationals held here in Perth. Sue Hogben has trained many different breeds throughout Australia. With her own dogs she has achieved TOP OBEDIENCE DOG of the year 12 times — a fantastic record. Her enthusiasm to the sport sees her conduct seminars and assist handlers to understand their dogs using positive training methods.

The most frustrating thing in the world is seeing people stuck in this mode — ‘the dog won’t do it without seeing the food!’ Aaaaargh!!

If you are using food as a lure you need to go through some progressions.

1. Food which the dog can see
2. Food in the hand that the dog cannot see (but the hand signal remains the same)
3. Food not in the hand, same signal and the food is quickly given as a reward
4. Show the dog the food in the other hand, have the dog do the behaviour with the familiar signal and reward quickly

This teaches the dog to work ‘away’ from the food if you understand what I mean. The first two progressions ‘should’ happen in the first or at least the second short training session, not months later!

Another progression is not to have the food on the handler but to have it stashed very close by (having been put there when the dog is not around), get the behaviour from the dog and quickly reward from the hidden stash. Also have the dog work in different locations around the house/yard without food in the hand and reward with the food that has been hidden without the dog having seen it. If this doesn’t work at first then the dog needs to be trained through the previous progressions in many different places.

One thing that often happens is that (1) The dog says ‘show me the food then I’ll do it’ and the handler complies, setting themselves up for a long slippery slope. (2) The handler uses food as a lure and reward and then asks the dog to repeat the behaviour without the food, and when the dog does they then don’t food reward! SO in one easy lesson the dog learns when it is shown the food it will get it, when it is not shown the food it will not get it! This is a huge lesson that you do not want your dog to learn.

Another problem is that people do not move away from food being the ‘only’ reward. I couldn’t tell you the amount of times I ask people what they use as a reward and they say “liver, cheese or a x type of food”. What happened to playing with the dog? A toy thrown or a game of tug, and what has happened to the dog getting a good chest rub from the handler? Playing with the dog seems to be the hardest one of all for people to get used to using as a reward, remembering that the dog has to see it as a reward.

## CONCLUSION

Using food is great but it can turn handlers into lazy trainers, it’s way too easy to just have a pocket or handful of food and to keep feeding the dog and not thinking about what is happening and going through each stage of training. It’s too easy to stay at one stage and not ask the dog for more work before getting rewards. And it is too easy to blame the dog for being pigheaded etc. for not working without obvious food, or to blame ‘food training’ for problems that crop up. The handler should always try to be aware of what they are aiming for in their training.

## A BIG THUMBS UP

To those who help put back into the Club. For any one who is unaware, Northern Suburbs is the largest Dog Club in the State. Unfortunately though, it is a few doing the work of many and the club can not continue that way. We need YOUR help. There are lots of tasks big and small that if done by ‘someone’ else would lighten the load off our ever so hardworking Instructors and Committee. YOU could be that ‘someone’. See Graeme after training and let him know you are ‘SOMEONE’. Help us help you.



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