

Teaching Fetch and Drop Objects on Command

"Fetch" and "Drop it" are very excellent commands to teach a young dog. Fetch is a great game most dogs love. It's mentally stimulating, wonderful for wearing a pet out, and acceptable type of play for children and dogs, and can provide a means for social interaction between visitors and shy dogs. Teaching the pet to drop things on command reinforces the idea that the owner has control over the dog and comes in handy when the pet has something in its mouth that it shouldn't.

Teaching Fetch

Pick a time when the pet is in an energetic mood and there are few distractions. Toss an interesting toy a short distance. As the pet picks it up and turns to look at you, lower your body, take several steps in the opposite direction, wave your hand and wiggle your fingers in an animated way, and say "Fetch" in a very upbeat tone. This should catch the attention of the pet and get it to come toward you. Continue to repeat "Fetch" as the pet approaches.

If the pet runs the other way with a toy, lies down and chews it, or does not come all the way up to you, simply walk away and end the play session. You must avoid chasing after the pet, walking toward it to take the toy or attempting to coax the pet to return.

Drop It - First Step

The first step involves luring the pet to drop the toy and teaching a cue word. As the pet approaches with the toy, place a piece of food between your forefinger and thumb. When the pet reaches you, move your hand and the food toward the pet's mouth with a bit of a flourish. Hold the food in front of the mouth without saying anything. When the pet opens its mouth to take the food, the toy will fall out. As this happens, say the cue words "Drop it," and pick up the toy with the other hand as you allow the pet to take the food. Repeat until you notice that the pet is starting to drop the toy as your hand just begins the downward movement towards it.



Use a small piece of food that is more interesting than the toy, but not so interesting that the pet will forget the toy and only focus on the food. Each time the pet takes the food from your hand, say "Good dog." If the pet is not interested in food, you can use a second toy in place of food to lure it to drop the fetched toy.

Drop It - Second Step

Next, you will begin giving the cue words earlier in the sequence. Instead of putting the food in front of the pet's mouth and waiting until it opens to say "Drop it," you will say "Drop it" as you begin to swing your hand down towards the pet. Pick up the toy, give the food, and say "Good dog." Repeat this at least 12 times before advancing to the next step.

Drop It - Third Step

The last step involves gradually phasing out the food. Hold your hand like you have food in it, swing it down toward the pet and say, "Drop it." When the pet drops it, say "Good dog" and give it loads of praise. As you continue to practice, alternate between a food reward and praise, varying the presentation so the pet doesn't know exactly which reward it will get each time it drops the toy. As the training progresses, you should be using more praise and less food.

Drop It - Other Items

Once the pet learns the "Drop it" command during play, it can be used whenever it has anything in its mouth. The transition from dropping toys during fetch to dropping more desirable items, like rawhide or food wrappers, should be made gradually. Rank the pet's toys from the most desirable to least desirable. When you notice that the pet has the least desirable toy in its mouth, ask it to drop it using a command and hand signal. Praise it or give a small food reward, then as it to sit and return the toy. When you find that it drops that toy readily, move to the next toy in the ranks and so forth. Be sure to always use an upbeat tone of voice and make the training fun. Practice is very important. The pet needs to drop something on command at least several times each day if you expect to be able to get to the point where it will drop special items like food wrappers and dead birds on command.

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