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## Your Smart Dog

### The Nose Knows: K9 Nose Work

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**Y**our dog's nose is about **100 times more sensitive than your own**. A dog can detect 1 teaspoon of sugar in the water it would take to fill two Olympic sized swimming pools. Your dog is built to sniff. And what happens in your dog's brain may be even more important, says Robert Gillette, D.V.M., M.S.E., director of the Sports Medicine Program at Auburn University College of Veterinary Medicine. "It's here that dogs are able to discriminate between smells and components of smells, which can be further enhanced through training," Gillette says.

Enter K9 Nose Work, a new sport making it's way across the country. **K9 Nose Work evolved from the work that professional handlers and their dogs do** – things like explosives detection, narcotics detection, cadaver searching, tracking, and search and rescue. These jobs require a great deal of training, discipline, and accuracy. There isn't any room for error and it's a real job – a job with consequences. Miss an explosive and both the dog and handler will pay with their lives.

Instead of searching for explosives, in K9 Nose Work the dog searches for a specific (harmless) scent. **K9 Nose Work is one of the few canine sports in which the dog teaches the human**. And any dog can do it! No "formal obedience" needed! Big or little, rowdy or sedate, active or lazy – your dog will like K9 Nose Work!

**Wanna get started with your dog? Here's what you'll need:**

- Human helper
- Hungry dog
- Lots of yummy, pea-sized treats or a toy if your dog is really play-motivated
- Cardboard boxes of all sizes (6 – 10)

**Hold your dog on a leash while your helper hides the closed treat bag (with a few loose treats on top of the treat bag) in one of the boxes.** The helper should play the "shell game" and move the boxes around so it's not immediately obvious which box holds the treats.

**Your dog will likely be interested and energetic while the treats are being hidden.** Once your helper stops moving the boxes and give you the ok signal, let your dog go.

**Be quiet!** This is the hardest part, really. We, the humans, don't do a thing. No helping, no talking. **The dogs are much better at this than we are.** Just sit back, keep quiet, and watch your dog's nose go to work. It may take your dog a few minutes to figure out the game, just be patient.

**As soon as your dog finds the reward, run to your dog, praise him, and give him a few more treats from the treat bag.** Pull the box away and let the helper hide the treats again (remember to put a little pile of treats on top of the treat bag so the dog gets an immediate reward when he finds the correct box).

**At first, all the boxes are completely open and on the ground.** Once the dog understands he needs to search in the boxes, you can make the task a little harder – close the flaps on some of the boxes. Or elevate some of the boxes about 1 – 2 feet (with open flaps). Once the dog is quickly finding the treats even with the flaps partially closed or in an elevated box, start closing the box completely or putting an empty box on top of the box with the treat pouch.



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**As the dog's skill increases, you'll introduce a precise scent.** K9 Nose Work competitions use three specific scents: birch, clove, and anise. The dog learns to search for one of these odors – and to ignore any other scents.

**If you get into the sport and really like it, you can compete!** The National Association of Canine Scent Work ([NACSW](#)) sets the standards governing the sport of canine K9 Nose Work. Before entering a trial, handler/dog teams must have passed the appropriate Odor Recognition Test (ORT) before entering the trial. The purpose of the ORT is to ensure the dogs know the target odor (scent) used in competition. The dog must identify the location of the target odor and the handler must correctly call an 'alert' (or equivalent) within a three-minute time period. After achieving ORT, you can then compete for titles.

**K9 Nose Work is a terrific sport, suitable for just about any dog.** This is a great outlet for reactive dogs – dogs who don't usually do well in a traditional obedience class because of the close proximity to other dogs. K9 Nose Work is done without any other dogs present – as long as the dog isn't aggressive toward humans, he's probably a good candidate for K9 Nose Work.

**It's also a great sport for older dogs** – speed or agility isn't needed. Just a good sniffer! It's just as good for younger dogs – dogs who can't yet participate in agility or other dog sports that are hard on a developing dog's body.

**K9 Nose Work takes advantage of the dog's unique and highly-developed sense of smell.** Letting your dog search for a particular scent works both his mind and his body – and it's great fun for the person to watch the amazing scenting ability of their dog.

**Smart Dog University plans on offering K9 Nose Work classes** late summer/early fall – stay tuned

for more information. We're excited to get started!

For more information on K9 Nose Works, check out these links:

[K9 Nose Work](#)  
[National Association of Canine Scent Work](#)

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