

# **What Kind of Treats Should You Use to Train Your Dog?**

The kind of dog treats you use when training your dog, make a significant difference with how successful your session is.

The right dog training treat can help a dog focus on you more easily around distractions. In some cases, a treat might be so hypnotic that a dog can't focus on the task you have given to them.

Many of my dog training clients are always asking me what kind of treat they should use with their dogs. With so many options available, it can be hard to know what dog treats to get.

The short answer is to use whatever training treats that ensure your dogs focus, and attention. Some dogs will listen for about anything. However, there are fussy eaters, and they can be even more finicky to take treats when they are around distractions like people and other dogs.

Knowing how to "Rank/ Grade" your dog's treats, as well as keeping them guessing what treat they will get will benefit you in a few ways. **Using a variety of treats** mixed together, not only keeps your dog interested and focused, but they will also be left guessing what kind of treat they may be given next. **With using treats of different grades encourages your dog to want to do better and earn a higher value treat.**

**(High** quality like real chicken breasts, **Medium** like a soft treat and **Low**, like a plain Cheerio)

This can be beneficial in many ways:

- You'll be able to train new behaviors faster
- You'll be able to fade out the use of food treats in training more effectively
- Your dog will be more focused on you (and responsive to you) around distractions
- Your dog won't get tired of the "same-old" treat
- You can better manage your dog's treat calorie intake

## **Figuring out what your dog likes**

If you ever here me or other dog trainers talk about using "high value" vs. "low value" training treats, this is the value a specific treat has to your dog, not the cost of the treat. You'll want to figure out what treats your dog finds more valuable than others.

## **What Are "High Value" Dog Treats?**

High-value treats tend to be moist or freeze-dried, extra smelly, and something your dog doesn't get very often (if at all) outside of training. Think tiny pieces of chicken, liver, duck, or even peanut butter (make sure it's xylitol-free) smeared on a spoon.

Think of your high value treats as giving your dog an "A+++" for behavior and training.

### **When Should You Use High-Value Treats?**

- When first introducing a brand-new trick, skill, or command.
- In highly distracting environments, **such as a group dog training class.**
- When rewarding your dog for a quick or high-quality response to a cue.
- If working on counter conditioning as part of a behavior modification plan for leash reactivity, aggression, anxiety, or fear.

**Avoid using foods that are high in fat, such as bacon or sausage. You don't want your dog to end up with an upset stomach or pancreatitis.**

## **What Are "Medium-Value" Dog Treats?**

These treats are usually semi-moist or dry treats made from ingredients that your dog doesn't get in their regular food. Medium value treats are given more frequently during training sessions and in everyday routines than high-value treats.

### **When Should You Use Medium Value Treats?**

- When maintaining an already learned behavior.
- In mildly distracting environments.
- Throughout the day for good behavior.

## **What Are "Low-Value" Dog Treats?**

Lower value treats are great to work into your training because they tend to be lower calorie than high and medium value dog treats. Low-value treats are usually dry and crunchy. Many of my clients as well as myself use our dog's regular kibble food for this level of treating.

Plain Cheerios are another excellent choice! Having a low value treat option is important in helping you **fade out treats in training.**

## When Should You Use Low-Value Treats?

- If your dog performs a requested and previously generalized cue, but it's a "C" grade performance (this also might indicate that your dog needs to be further from a distraction or might need to go back a few steps in training)
- Throughout the day to encourage continued good behavior
- In low to no distraction training environments
- As part of regular enrichment activities
- When you're fading out the use of treats for a specific behavior

## Have a Dog Treat "Taste Test"

To help you pick out the training treats that your dog will most enjoy and respond to the best, set up a treat taste test for your pup.

**(Note: Check treat ingredients to ensure they don't contain anything your dog is allergic or sensitive to.)**

First, pick out a few different options of treats for them to try, based on:

- **Protein type:** Have a variety of fish, poultry, beef, pork, or lamb. Include non-meat-based treats, such as peanut butter.
- **Texture:** Choose different treat options based on their texture type — dry, semi-moist, jerky, freeze-dried, or wet.
- **Ease of Delivery:** When you're picking out taste test options, make sure you're choosing treats that are easy for you to give your dog. **Training treats should be pea-sized or smaller.** If the treats are larger than this in the bag, see if you can easily break them up into smaller pieces. I personally like when soft treats are pre-scored allowing me to determine the size I want to break them up.

**Pro Tip:** Many pet supply stores will have samples available upon request of different treats to try. This is how I often discover new brands of treats to mix into my training treat rotation.

If your dog doesn't like the treats you bought, (this can also apply with bags of pet food), many pet stores will except an exchange, return, or refund of open and partially empty bags. If the store will not except it, check online with the manufacture, a lot of companies offer full refunds if your pet didn't like, and others say, "for any reason." So, if it's not working out, get your money back, and spend it on something your dog WILL

Next, give your dog a choice between the different treats. Put one kind of treat in one hand and a different kind in the other hand and close your hands to make a fist. (You can also use small cups to cover the treat options on the ground if you prefer, especially if your dog gets mouthy when taking treats.)

Allow your dog to sniff both hands, watching to see which they show the most interest in. Give them the one they sniff at, lick at, or paw at the most.

Switch out different treats, rotating in ones you've already tried with different alternatives, to get an idea of what your dog's high-value, medium-value, and low-value treats are.

### High-Value Dog Training Treats

My go-to high-value treats include small pieces of turkey hotdog, plain chicken, string cheese, and [Vital Essentials Minnows](#), [Northwest Naturals Lamb Liver](#), and [Stella & Chewy's Beef Heart treats](#).

- Vital Essentials Freeze-Dried Minnows Dog Treat
- Northwest Naturals Freeze-Dried Lamb Liver



- Stella & Chewy's Beef Heart Treats



## Medium-Value Dog Training Treats

### Zuke's Mini Naturals Rabbit Recipe Dog Treats-

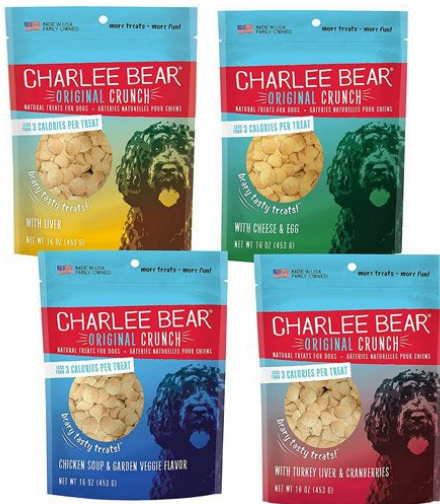


These treats come in many assorted flavors such as Chicken, Peanut Butter, Beef, Salmon, **Duck**, and Pork.

### Redbarn Naturals Protein Puffs – Cheese Flavor



### Charlee Bear Crunchy Dog Treats



### Wellness Soft Puppy Bites Lamb & Salmon Recipe Grain-Free Dog Treats



These also come in a Chicken and Carrots flavor.



## Wholehearted Grain Free Soft and Chewy

### Bacon Recipe Dog Stick Treats



These come in other flavors like Chicken and Beef, as well as other forms like balls and strips.

### True Chews Premium Duck Jerky Cuts



## Low-Value Dog Training Treats

Try using First Mate dry food or break up IMK9's Mutt Love Coconuts dry treats as her lower value rewards.



### Firstmate Wild Pacific Grain-Friendly Dog Food

## IMK9 Mutts Love Coconuts Dog Treats



## Wild Eats Sweet Potato & Chicken Treats



Plain Cheerios are another excellent choice! Having a low value treat option is important in helping you **fade out treats in training.**

**PRO TIP:** Work your dog's brain! Hold back a portion of your dog's regular meals to use as training treats throughout the day, and feed all of their regular meals from interactive toys and puzzles.

The kind of treats you use when training your dog (or just want to give them a special treat) depend on your dog's personal preferences. And remember, it's not always about food! Many dogs find toys, attention, and other real-life rewards incredibly rewarding too. Knowing what your dog likes and what they'll work for will make your training more effective.