

Just for Fun

Backyard versions of six popular canine games.

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You throw the ball over and over again, and your dog happily retrieves it. But wouldn't it be more fun to play with your dog in ways that bring out his special talents? Borrowing a few ideas from canine sports, use these tips to make backyard playtime more fun.

Jumping. Make your own agility or flyball hurdle by placing a broom or PVC pipe across two plastic buckets. Hold a treat on one side, and encourage your dog to jump over.

Jump, sit, stay. Create an agility pause table by placing a bench, ottoman, or piece of carpeted plywood on four cement blocks. Teach your dog to jump onto the low table, then sit or lie down for five seconds, then jump off. Ta-da!

Backyard tunneling. Using a nylon pipe tunnel, coax your dog inside it with food. Run alongside the tunnel or sit at the other end to persuade him through. Reward your dog with toys or food at the end.

Enthusiastic fetching. Flyball dogs are rapid fetchers. To build your dog's excitement, throw the ball, hold him back for 10 seconds, and then let him sprint after it.

Hide and seek. Teach tracking skills by showing your dog a toy and hiding it in an easy to find location. Once he gets the hang of the game, ask friends to walk away from your dog to a hiding place in the yard. Ready or not, here he comes. As your dog's skills improve, have your dog sit with his back turned while everyone else hides.

Simon says. In Rally obedience, you instruct your dog to perform skills printed on directional signs. Make your own obedience signs, such as "right turn," and place them around the yard to create a mini-course for you and your dog.