

Train Your Dog to Dock Jump

Teach your water-loving dog this high-flying, big-splashing sport.

By Maryanne Dell

Dock jumping is an exhilarating sport that challenges dogs to jump far and high from the end of a dock into a pool or lake. If you want to train your dog to dock jump, consider its experience with water. Some dogs take to jumping off a dock like, well, like a duck to water. But others need assistance.

At no time should you force your dog into the water. Dock jumping, like all dog sports, must be fun for the dog, and should be taught using positive methods. Follow these guidelines to help your dog learn to love the water.

Dog, meet water

Don't assume your dog can swim; not all can.

A pool with a gradually sloped entrance is best to introduce your dog to water because it allows your dog easy access to the water. Other pools or natural bodies of water can also work when you use precautions.

Stagnant water often contains parasites and bacteria that can make your dog sick, so be careful if using a lake or pond. Avoid water with algae; some forms are deadly.

Keep sessions in the pool brief; your dog can become ill if he drinks too much chlorinated water.

After your dog finishes a swimming session, hose him down with clean, fresh water.

Training tips

Once all precautions have been noted, it's time to train. Use a toy your dog loves, and be sure to act excited. Your excitement will spread to your dog and help him enjoy the game.

Show your dog his toy, make a fuss over it, then place it close to the water. When he grabs the toy, play tug for a few seconds. Ask your dog release the toy, then place it at the edge of the water. Play again.

With each repetition, move the toy closer to the water, then eventually place it into the water. If your dog hesitates, move the toy back to a spot where he eagerly grabbed it. You may need to keep the toy at one spot for a few repetitions.

If you train slowly and keep the sessions fun, most dogs will enter the water to retrieve the toy. The rate at which this happens will vary from dog to dog, but training this way will gradually condition most dogs to love running into the water.

Now you can move on to tossing your dog's toy into the water from a dock or the side of the pool.

Before you know it, your dog will be splashing right in and having a blast.

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