



Photo by Animax

# Toy Box Trick

In a corner of my living room I have a dog toy box where old and new, cute and well-chewed dog toys of all descriptions have a home. My dogs, especially the puppy, know at any time they can forage for a prized, favourite toy. All pets like a little variety with toys so I often rotate the bottom toys to the top of the box to mix things up and keep their interest.

Quite recently I returned from a shopping trip to find virtually every toy from the box scattered throughout the lounge—mostly on the floor and some strategically placed on the sofa and coffee table. The dogs had made the most of my time away and had spent their energy on games and not on chewing the couch—which is as it should be. The mess, however, reminded me of the times when I was kid. Our toys would be strewn from one end of the house to the other. My mother would insist, “Make sure those toys are put away and off the floor before your father gets home.” In my childhood world, your dad tripping over a forgotten Barbie or Mr Potato Head was tantamount to the threat of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Always of the opinion that dogs love jobs and reward-based training, I thought of a clever way to train the pups to play pick-up. Most of my friends have a hard time getting their children to pick up after themselves, but if you make this a fun, reward-based game, you’ll find that playing pick-up will make everyone happy.

- Start with handing your dog a toy and tell him to “take it”. When he has the toy in his mouth, click and treat him for holding it. You can also start this practice if your dog is in the habit of bringing the toy to you.
- Position the toy box by your feet and encourage the dog to come to you. Click and treat him for holding the toy over the toy box.
- Repeat the previous step, but ask the dog to “drop it” as he holds the toy over the box. Some trainers use the word “release” – use whatever works for you as long as it’s consistent and not confusing other words you use in training.
- Put the toy on the floor and tell him to “take it”. Click and treat him for picking up the toy.
- Repeat the previous step with several more toys on the floor.
- Replace the “take it” and “drop it” cues with the new cue: “toys away”, by saying the new cue right before the old cue. Over time, fade out the old cue.

As always, make training sessions brief and upbeat. In no time your dog will be happy to pick up after himself. No guarantees on whether this method will work for your spouse or children.

## Green tip

*Old-style wooden wine boxes are great for storing toys. They’re made of robust wood, are deep and too heavy for the average dog to move around. Many larger wine outlets have these available for a few dollars or even for free.*



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