

Summer Enrichment Ideas

Breanne Tabbert, Animal Behavioral Specialist



FOR YOUR DOG

- Pupsicles: place some of your dog's favorite treats in an ice cube tray/metal bowl, fill with water, freeze overnight, pop out the next day for a cool treat.
***For extra flavor, check out dog-safe fruits and veggies that can add some variety to your pupsicles!
- Kiddie pools: not just for the kids! Fill a small pool with water for your dog to walk, wade, or lie down in. Throw in some float toys for extra fun!
- Food scatter: instead of feeding your dog in a boring old bowl, scatter their kibble in the yard so they can engage that magnificent sniffer to hunt down dinner.
- Tricks: if it's too hot to be outside, hang out in the air conditioning and teach your dog some new tricks! Shake, roll over, sit pretty, fetch the remote . . . the possibilities are endless!

NOT THE FURRY, DROOLING, TAIL WAGGING, BARKING TYPE?

- For your feline friends: put a handful of soft toys in a container, sprinkle in some catnip, and let them "marinate" for a couple days. Once that's done, pull out one at a time to delight your cat with a "new" toy everyday!
- For your critter friends: scatter their food in their enclosure rather than filling their bowl. It will encourage them to explore their space and use their senses.
- For your reptile friends: adding a novel perch can change their whole environment and give them an extra place to sun.

Do you have questions on how to help your pet live its best life? Our Animal Behavioral Specialist, Breanne Tabbert, is here to answer any pet-related questions you have. Reach out to her at breanne@cuhumane.org.



MYTHS & FACTS:

ADDRESSING MISCONCEPTIONS

by Mary Tiefenbrunn

MYTH: "A WAGGING TAIL MEANS THE DOG IS HAPPY."

FACT: A WAGGING TAIL ALONE IS NOT ENOUGH.

It's a common misconception that dogs only wag their tails when they're happy. In fact, dogs use their tails to communicate many different things about their emotional state and learning to read your dog's tail is a bit like learning a foreign language . . . if you're a human, that is.

Dogs are pack animals. We say it all the time, but what does it mean? It means dogs are social animals and as such, they must be good communicators in order to coexist in harmony. WE don't hear them "talking" but dogs are communicating all the time - nonverbally. Every part of the dog's body is conveying something that every other dog is picking up on. Experienced observers of canine body language will notice the most subtle changes in tension around the eyes or the mouth, a slight change in the angle of the ear, or muscular tension throughout the body. A short "freeze" will often be a sign that an aggressive action is imminent, but the freeze can happen so fast, if you're not looking for it, you'll miss it.

But let's get back to the tail.

The easiest and most obvious way to be sure a dog's tail-wag is a happy one is to look at the dog's entire body. If it looks like he's wagging his entire hind end, starting at his waist, that's an excellent sign that he really is in good spirits! Look for a wiggly butt, not just a wagging tail.

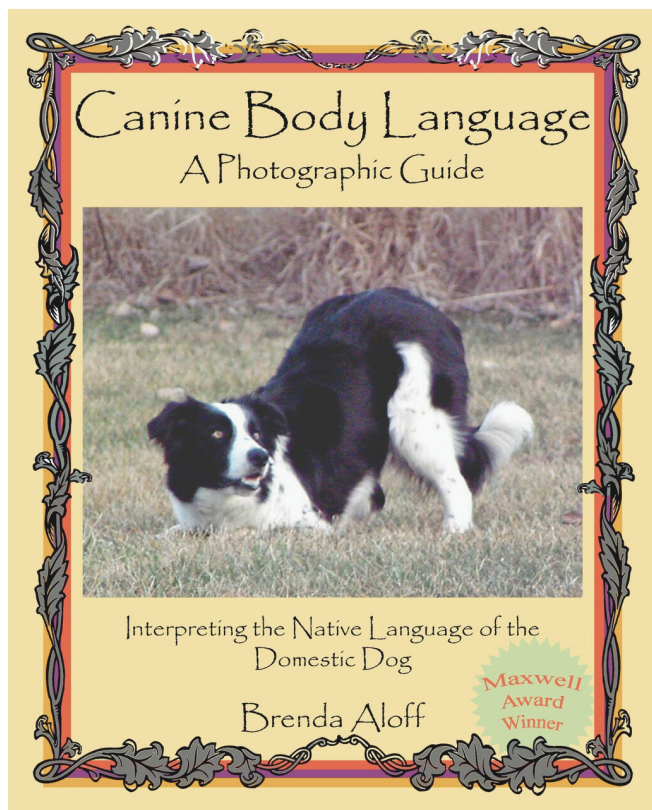
If the tail is held high over the back and arched, it can be an aggressive posture and if it's wagging it can indicate high arousal - which can be either good or bad. Some dogs naturally have a high tail carriage (based on breed), so knowing the dog is helpful. If you see a dog in this posture, look for other clues to determine whether the dog is in an agitated/aggressive state, or just aroused and ready for fun. If there is tension in the rest of the body and the dog is not loose and wiggly, don't assume the wag is 'happy.'

When dogs are afraid or want to be viewed as submissive or non-threatening, they'll often hold their tail low. If they're truly frightened, they'll tuck it between their hind legs. If the tail is held low, but still wagging, it can be a sign that the dog is slightly fearful or conflicted about the situation he is in. This is a common scenario people often confuse with a sign of happiness, and thus inadvertently leave their dog in an uncomfortable situation.

Distinguishing whether your dog is truly enjoying a situation or merely tolerating it is extremely important when you're introducing your dog to other dogs, new people, or children for the first time. Giving your dog a break from a stressful situation can prevent their sense of discomfort from escalating. And "escalating discomfort" is not a good thing! Remember the principle of "fight or flight." When you remove a dog's ability to flee a fearful situation, you increase the likelihood that he'll resort to aggression as a way of coping with the perceived threat.

When it comes to interpreting dog body language, observing the tail is just one piece of the puzzle, but not a bad place to start. Just remember to move your eyes off the tail and check the rest of the body. If you're interested in learning more, I've listed some good books on the subject below.

Watching dogs communicate – whether with humans or other dogs – can be a lot of fun, especially the more you do it. And the reward is great – a better understanding of your best friend and a more harmonious coexistence!



RECOMMENDED READING

- *Canine Body Language, A Photographic Guide* by Brenda Aloff
- *On Talking Terms with Dogs: Calming Signals* by Turid Rugass
- *The Secret Language of Dogs: Unlocking the Canine Mind for a Happier Pet* by Victoria Stillwell



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Paw Prints

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