

Darling Dog

For Dog Lovers, By Dog Lovers

MAY 2025

Socializing Your Dog

HOW TO BUILD
CONFIDENCE
WITH NEW
EXPERIENCES

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Sam

Darling Photos

FROM OUR READERS



Bambi



Argo



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WELCOME READERS!

recently returned from a Spring Break vacation to Colorado with my family. It was a blast! The kids absolutely loved their first experience hitting the freshly powdered slopes! Mama was a good sport. She is not a fan of cold and despises snow!

I also got to see how much dogs love the snow! We rarely get snow in south Alabama (this year was an anomaly), so it was quite a treat to see so many pups frolicking in the Colorado Rockies! I had the honor of meeting some new canine friends and their people as well. It was such a treat to see that so many travel with their dogs and are able to share the beauty of nature with their furry friends!



Ozzy



Tigger



Yuna

I saw lots of photos of well-traveled pups that their human companions were all too happy to share! Isn't it great to always have a camera in your pocket (now that I am middle-aged)? We at *Darling Dog* would love to see and share pictures of you and your pups traveling or just out for a walk in the neighborhood! Submit your photos at DarlingDog.com/photo-submission!

Beau Boyd, Editor, DarlingDog.com

Achoooooo!
.....

Spring Into Safety Seasonal Tips For Your Pup



Spring has officially sprung, and our dogs know it! Longer days, fragrant air, and more time outside bring plenty of joy—but also some seasonal health concerns to stay ahead of. In this month's column, I'm

sharing practical tips to help your pup stay safe, happy, and healthy all spring long.

1. ALLERGY AWARENESS

Yes, dogs get seasonal allergies too. Look for signs like scratching, licking paws,



red or watery eyes, and even sneezing or ear infections. A veterinary exam can help determine the best course of treatment, whether it's medication, supplements, or topical care.

2. FLEA & TICK PREVENTION

Ticks and fleas wake up early in the spring. Even city dogs are at risk if they frequent parks or trails. Monthly preventatives—prescribed by your vet—offer the best protection. Don't skip doses, even if your dog seems "safe."

3. HEARTWORM SEASON

Heartworms are transmitted by mosquitoes, and spring kicks off peak mosquito activity. Preventatives are a must—heartworm disease is dangerous, costly to treat, and entirely preventable.

4. SPRINGTIME SNACKING HAZARDS

Gardens, picnics, and spring holidays introduce plenty of new temptations for dogs. Be mindful of toxic foods like chocolate, grapes, and anything sweetened with xylitol, as well as plants like lilies, tulips, and daffodils.

5. OUTDOOR ADVENTURE SAFETY

If your dog's joining you for hikes or beach trips, check their paws and coat afterward for ticks, foxtails, or burrs. Also ensure their ID tags are up to date and collars fit snugly—spring excitement can lead to unexpected sprints!

MEET DR. MAX HARPER, DVM

Dr. Max Harper, DVM, is a practicing veterinarian with a passion for educating pet parents about all things canine. He believes every dog deserves a long, happy, and healthy life.

Springtime Smart: Quick Tips For A Healthy, Happy Pup

PAW CHECK PROTOCOL:

After every walk or hike, give your dog's paws a quick once-over. Look for cuts, lodged debris, or signs of irritation.

HYDRATION REMINDER:

Warmer weather means thirstier pups! Always bring water for your dog during outdoor activities—and offer it often.

VET VISIT HACK:

Spring is a great time to book your dog's annual exam and get up to date on vaccines, preventatives, and wellness labs.

EASTER CAUTION:

Plastic grass, candy wrappers, and leftover ham bones are post-holiday hazards. Keep them far out of reach.

FINAL WOOF

Spring is a season of renewal—for both humans and hounds. A little extra care now ensures your dog can fully enjoy all the sunshine, sniffs, and adventures ahead. As always, if something seems off or you just have a question, don't hesitate to check in with your vet. We're here to help. ☺

Socializing Your Dog

How To Build Confidence With New Experiences



Let's be real—some dogs strut into the world like social butterflies, ready to sniff every bush, bark at every squirrel, and befriend every dog they meet. Others? Well, they're more like awkward freshmen on the first day of school, unsure of what to do with themselves and sticking close to your leg like it's home base.

But no matter where your pup falls on the social spectrum, socializing your dog is one of the most important things you can do for their confidence, happiness, and overall well-being. The good news? It's never too early—or too late—to start.

So grab your leash, a handful of treats, and your most encouraging "You got this, buddy!" voice. We're diving into the wonderfully sniff-filled world of dog socialization tips that'll help your pup feel confident in every new situation they face.

1. START SMALL AND GO SLOW

Socializing your dog doesn't mean throwing them into the middle of a crowded dog park and yelling, "Make friends!" In fact, that's kind of like forcing a shy kid to give a speech at a birthday party—not helpful.

Start with quiet, controlled environments. Introduce your dog to one new person, dog, or place at a time. Let them take the lead (literally and emotionally). The goal is to make each new experience positive, not overwhelming.

Pro tip: Short and sweet is the name of the game. Five minutes of a good experience is way better than 30 minutes of sensory overload.

2. EXPOSE THEM TO DIFFERENT PEOPLE

Dogs don't automatically know that tall people in hats or kids with sticky fingers are safe. Help your dog learn by gently introducing them to people of all shapes, sizes, ages, and voices. That includes:

- People with sunglasses
- Kids on bikes
- Joggers
- People in wheelchairs or using walkers
- Your uncle who smells like beef jerky

Each person is a new opportunity for learning. Just remember to let your dog approach them when they're ready—no forced cuddles allowed.

3. MEET OTHER DOGS (BUT CHOOSE WISELY)

Not every dog is a good match for yours, and that's okay! Just like us, dogs have personalities and preferences.

Start with one calm, friendly dog at a time in a neutral space. Let them sniff, observe, and interact on their own terms. Keep leashes loose and tension low. If both dogs are vibing, let them have a little playtime. If one looks overwhelmed, it's totally fine to take a break.

Doggy daycare and puppy classes can also be great—but make sure they're run by professionals who understand dog body language and group dynamics.

4. PRACTICE IN DIFFERENT ENVIRONMENTS

Your dog's confidence builds when they experience new environments without stress. Think: elevators, car rides, busy sidewalks, coffee shops with outdoor seating, hardware stores (yep, many are dog-friendly!).

Introduce these places gradually, and always bring high-value treats and a calm voice. Even just sitting on a bench together and people-watching can be a great training opportunity.

Bonus points if you make it a game: How many new smells can your dog investigate without losing their cool?

5. REWARD BRAVE BEHAVIOR

Anytime your dog does something confident—like walking calmly past another dog, sniffing a new person, or sitting quietly while a skateboard rolls by—celebrate it like they just won Best in Show.

That might mean a treat, a happy "Yes!", or a belly rub if that's their jam. Reinforcing the good stuff helps build trust and encourages them to explore even more.

6. WATCH FOR STRESS SIGNALS

Your dog will tell you if something is too much—they just use body language instead

of words. Look for signs like the following:

- Tucked tail
- Lip licking
- Yawning
- Avoiding eye contact
- Raised hackles
- Panting when they haven't exercised

If you see any of these, give your dog space and reassurance. Take a step back and try again later or in a quieter setting.

Remember, confidence is built, not forced.

7. KEEP IT CONSISTENT

Socializing isn't a one-and-done task. It's more like brushing your teeth—you've got to keep at it. Incorporate new experiences into your regular routine. Even just walking a different route or saying hi to a friendly neighbor can help keep your dog's social skills sharp.

And hey, it keeps things interesting for you, too.

8. DON'T FORGET TO HAVE FUN!

Socialization should be a positive adventure, not a chore. Your dog feeds off your energy—if you're relaxed and excited, they're more likely to be, too.

So laugh at the silly moments, cheer them on when they're brave, and don't be afraid to hit the pause button if something's too much. You and your dog are a team, and every experience is a building block in your relationship.

Whether your dog is a confident explorer or a cautious observer, socialization is the secret sauce that helps them grow into a well-adjusted companion. By taking things slow, reinforcing bravery, and tuning into their body language, you're giving your pup the tools they need to navigate the world with wagging tails and open hearts.

So here's to new friends, new smells, and new adventures—your dog's next confidence boost is just around the corner. 🐾

BITCH, PLEASE

The Life Of Mae, A Boykin From Mobile

INSTALLMENT VI



Lent is more than a four-letter word. For me, the season is not about preparation or soul-searching. I certainly do not give up anything. My human, a moderately High Church Episcopalian (who at different times in his life has either been very observant about services or has missed both Christmas and Easter), is of the opinion that I think of Lent as an opportunity to further hone my many bad habits. Such is the case. The dude is not off the mark. Hey, a good dog like moi can be a bad girl! Thank the almighty I am pretty because that reality gets me out of a lot of trouble. I understand

why you might wonder why I am overly devilish during the Lenten season. Let me tell you. The answer is quite simple—Carnival.

At this juncture, you might benefit from a mini history lesson. Do recall that my human is a historian. I have learned a thing or two from that increasingly rounded joker. Someone take the Cheez-Its away from him. Add to that any and all cookies! Give them to me while you are at it! Back on topic, Carnival is a cultural phenomenon with roots that go back to Etruscan culture. Ultimately, aspects of those ancient pagan celebrations were appropriated and rebranded by the Roman

Catholic Church and spread all over the world through colonialization. Carnival, with Mardi Gras or Tuesday as its height, has a special place in my town and household. Mobile is the birthplace of American Carnival. The Port City is even known as the “Mother of Mystics.”

The first mystic society, or Carnival organization, in the United States—the Cowbellion de Rakin Society—was established in my fair city in 1830. It was “The Cows” that established the two-part template of American Carnival—the coordination of a parade and a ball united by a common theme. Papier-mâché floats articulate the given theme in the former, while tableaux or theatrical performances express the theme during the latter. Parades are enjoyed by all. Members and invited guests attend balls. While the Cowbellion de Rakin Society disbanded in the 1890s, Carnival culture thrives in Mobile. It is a glorious living tradition. There are over eighty mystic societies in town. Carnival is now found across the United States, though it has its strongest presence in the Gulf South. In the 1830s, the parade-ball tradition went up the Alabama River system. Only in the 1850s was a mystic society founded in New Orleans. We are not going there. Those people do have a dog krewé, though!

Now, having the benefit of the preceding history lesson, you may wonder why Carnival impacts my behavior. Not only do I live in Mobile but also my human is a historian of Carnival, among other subjects. He is the curator of the Mobile Carnival Museum. In addition to place of residence and work, the tubs is a member of a mystic society. All of this translates into my human companion being away from me more often than usual during the height of the Carnival season. Work and play rob me of him. Typical of my breed, I have major separation anxiety. To add insult to injury, I am often placed in my crate. That cage is like a doggie prison! My human tries to mitigate his

absences and my consequent incarcerations by way of walks, treats, and other placations.

Instead of running every morning, the graying fatso will take me on long walks. The man needs exercise. The only six pack in our house is now in the refrigerator. He puts on more weight every year during the annual festivities. His diet is liquid, of course, during this time. I drag him everywhere on our morning walks out of revenge and to help him lose a pound or two. In previous installments of this column, I have described our long walks. During Carnival Season, there is so much more to them. Lots of more people are downtown during the Season. Parades do not happen during the early morning hours, but lingering elements of them are in the air and on the ground. The stinky air is like Chanel No. 5 to me. Yum, just yum. Think burned tires, fried food, horse dung, and steam all around you and you have a hint at the aromas.

Maskers on floats toss what are called throws. I like throws. My spare human brings me stuffed animals and balls tossed during parades. Lots of times, people do not retrieve throws that fall on the ground. Street sweepers and leaf blowers remove most of the unwanted throws. Some of the seasonal offerings are missed, while others are smushed by tires and feet. Foodstuffs comprise a significant number of throws. Moon Pies are the most popular edible type of throw. I am ordinarily not a fan of Moon Pies. A foot- or wheel-trodden Moon Pie is a delicacy. Even the plastic tastes good after being flattened out all of the night. I use my snout and eyes to scour the streets and sidewalks of downtown Mobile for smooched Moon Pies.

Other foodstuffs far outrank Moon Pies. This Bitch has a discerning and varied palette you know. Nibbles tossed by maskers are low-hanging Carnival fare in terms of quality. The main course in my mind’s eye is street fare. Food trucks, vendors, and concessions

“Have you ever eaten a week-old hot dog? I have. Let me tell you, they are delicious, especially the pink ones!”

abound during the Season. By the time I get those offerings, they have been discarded, which makes them tastier in my book. Have you ever eaten a week-old hot dog? I have. Let me tell you, they are delicious, especially the pink ones! My human tries to steer me clear of any and all foodstuffs we might encounter on our morning progresses. I generally snag something on account of channeling my thirty-some-odd pounds into a figure multiple times that amount. I pull my fat-ass human all over the downtown during those walks in search of delicacies, like pink hot dogs, corn dogs, and chicken-on-a-stick. I do not do funnel cake. That is food for another type of Carnival. As if!

Dogs are not allowed to attend parades. My human loves them, but he fails to bring me any offerings from them. How rude! The spare gives me throws. That one is thoughtful like that. Balls and stuffed animals are high on my lists of parade take-homes. Footballs do nothing for me. They are too big. Soft plush balls the size of baseballs and softballs are more to my liking. Stuffed animals are causes for instantaneous and continued joy. Like having two speeds, on and off, I have two approaches to stuffed animals. I either destroy said offering upon receipt or treat it like a baby. When a stuffed animal becomes my baby (said a la Moira Rose), I carry it on my walks. I should say I start carrying it and then drop it for my human to carry for me. Seeing him carry a stuffed Smurfette for miles causes me to smile and laugh! A girl has to get here kicks when she can. I never miss an opportunity! I had my

stuffed Smurfette for almost a year. One day, I destroyed her, like I do to all of my toys at some juncture. It is questionable what type of mother I would be. After one particular parade party, spare human also brings me a true Mobile culinary confection of the highest order—a Dew Drop Inn hot dog. The Dew Drop is oldest dining establishment in town. The hot dogs there are the bomb. A pink dog, of the non-canine variety of course, is placed in a bun. Such should come as no shocker, Sherlocks. With a Dew Drop hot dog, the pink deliciousness is topped by canned relish. I can eat them whole, which is strange for me as I ordinarily do not like it when foods are combined. The lady is quasi-kosher. Main human, the tub-o does not bring treats home from functions, period. That is downright tacky. I like offerings.

Sometimes, my human allows me to sleep in the bed with him during the Carnival season. This is a special privilege. I try to hop up on the bed most nights but am evicted from the ultimate of soft surfaces. When the Fatso comes home from a function where he has been into his cups, I can manipulate him with my sad eyes into allowing me to hop on the bed and remain there. He tells me the duration of my stay on the bed is brief. I have other plans, being I stay the night and occupy the whole of the bed!

Walks, foodstuffs, treats, and other peace offerings fail to fully compensate for being deserted, placed in a crate, and having my routine disrupted. I have been sent up the country a time or two for Mardi Gras weekend. Other times, people stop by the house to walk with, play with, and feed me. Even though these reproachments are nice, they are only temporary fixes. I simply want Carnival to end.

Again, Lent is more than a word. It is a return to normalcy and a return to the status quo after weeks of disruption. I am once again the ruler of the household. Debts must be settled. Revenge is served hot, lukewarm, and cold. I inflict my anger via a number of tactics. Both

the performing and fine arts are channeled into glorious expressions of revenge and reconquest.

Like Dorothy Zbornak in *Golden Girls*, I can cut a side eye. The human is never in doubt as to my take on matters, or him for that matter. My eyes can turn on a dime. There is no subtlety to the evil eye. What is far worse than my glare, which communicates “Eat dirt and die, trash,” is no eye whatsoever. I regularly act as if my human does not exist. I avert my eyes from his very presence during and immediately after Mardi Gras. I turn my head from him. At times, I face my backside to him to make my sentiments very emphatic. The message is kiss it, bitch! My snout also comes into play. Do not worry, this lady is not a biter, but I do curl my lip at times. On occasion, a low growl of disgust has emanated from my noble nose. On those occasions, I am dropping the “f” bomb at the disobedient manservant. I swat at things, too. Even if something is presented to me, which under regular circumstances I might welcome, I paw at it with anger or bat it in the other direction. If the offering is a desirable foodstuff, I retrieve it when the tubs turns his head.

My paws and teeth are vehicles of more than performative artistry. They are the principal means by which I express my disgust in the form of the fine arts of sculpture painting and sculpture. I spit at glass panes of the French doors and use my paws to spread the spittle everywhere. It’s as if I am possessed. You see why my human has to put me in my crate or carrier when left unattended. Picture if you will a Jackson Pollock, only of dog spittle. It is my therapy and revenge. The front door and the laundry room door bear witness to my talents as sculptress. I have almost eaten the lowermost muntins—the wooden dividers of panes—on the front door down to the glass. My rage over the abandonment and disruptions of Carnival causes me to be almost a doggy interior designer. My mantra is neither minimalism nor maximalism, simply destruction. See that, I included the decorative arts?! Go me!



Lent has its uses, purposes, and pleasures. After my initial psychopathic escapades, I relax and relate. I celebrate the return of life as I know and like it. After I process my anger, I gradually cool off and show affection to my human again. The weather is warming up, days become longer, and weekends up the country are more frequent again; so too are beach trips. I am all in on all of the above. 🐾



MEET CART BLACKWELL

Cartledge Weeden Blackwell III, “Cart,” is a historian and a curator. Blackwell was born in Selma, Alabama. He obtained an undergraduate degree from the College of Charleston and his graduate degree from the University of Virginia. He authored *Of People and Of Place: Portraiture in Alabama (1870-1945): Reconstruction to Modernism* for the Alabama Chapter of the National Society of Colonial Dames of America (NSCDA). His second book, *Of Color and Light: The Life and Art of Artist-Designer Clara Weaver Parrish*, is to be published by the University of Alabama Press in the winter of 2025.

Blackwell has penned scores of articles for magazines and numerous essays for exhibit catalogues. An eighth-generation Alabamian, Cart loves his native state. When not found on his family’s farm in Wilcox County, he is on the Gulf Coast. Regardless of where he finds himself, Mae, his crafty spaniel, is always by his side!

MY DOG IS MY
CO-PILOT

The Duckie Diapers



March Madness holds a special place for me, taking me back to the '70s watching my then Memphis State

Tigers. It holds the same allure for my cousin, and each year, we try to gather at her beach house to watch basketball and eat foods that are not particularly healthy. Fortunately, my cousin is also a dog person, so Winnie Lew is welcome to join the festivities (with a caveat).

Winnie Lew made her first trip there four years ago. At the time, my cousin had three yorkies varying in age. The oldest, Savannah

(who has since crossed over the rainbow bridge), could neither see nor hear, and as we say in the south, "Bless her heart." Her life consisted of moving around the room bumping into things. She was kind of like a Roomba with hair. Winnie Lew took an immediate liking to Savannah and decided that her role would be that of shepherd and protector.

The youngest of the three, Pippa, was still a puppy at that time. I think there is probably a picture of her by the phrase "yapper dog" in the dictionary. She was a thorn in Savannah's and Winnie Lew's side with her constant yapping. Pippa was always running up with a full head of steam and a lot to talk about. Often, she would knock poor Savannah over, her not being aware of the oncoming onslaught. Winnie Lew did not take kindly to Pippa's treatment of the matriarch of the canine clan. Each dog had its own little toy box—sharing didn't seem to be something they did. Which brings us to the incident.

When we first arrived, I felt Winnie Lew tense up at the largest noise coming from the smallest package. She looked at me, and I truly could read her thoughts begging me to "please make that bow head stop yapping." We retreated to our bedroom with our luggage, and I had a heart-to-heart with Winnie Lew, telling her that sometimes there are just things you have endure for the love of basketball and the beach. I thought she understood. She did her best to endure, and she lasted almost 36 hours before it got the best of her and she decided she needed to do something about it. She tolerated Pippa barking in her face and jumping at her, but she was not going to tolerate that behavior with Savannah. Winnie Lew has never had an accident in any home and never tried to mark her territory. That streak was about to change.

Pippa had knocked poor Savannah over for the umpteenth time, and Winnie Lew decided something had to be done and she was just the dog to do it. Winnie Lew stared Pippa

down and promptly trotted over, lifted her leg, and relieved herself in Pippa's toybox. The message sent, she trotted over and jumped up in my lap, and if she had had opposable thumbs, she would have given Savannah a thumbs up. Needless to say, my cousin was appalled at my fur baby's behavior. She grabbed the toys and the toybox and ran to the laundry room to disinfect everything. She came back with wipes, vinegar, and God knows what else and began to clean the entire area. I think she would have worn a hazmat suit if she had had one.

No amount of exciting basketball or Rotel dip was going to fix the situation. There was an eerie silence in the room (Pippa did indeed close her yapper). I apologized profusely while inwardly being kind of proud of Winnie Lew's problem-solving abilities. Next thing I knew, my cousin was on her computer and mumbling something about "rescue" dogs, and she would have a solution by the following day. Winnie Lew was banished to my bathroom for the remainder of the day.

The following afternoon, an Amazon delivery arrived at the door. My cousin handed it to me and said proudly, "This should take care of Winnie Lew's problem." In the box was a package of three doggie diapers. One of the patterns was duckies, and Winnie Lew seemed to be the least offended by that pattern. They did kind of match her fur. So, on went the doggie diapers and an embarrassed Winnie Lew just sat pitifully in my lap enduring the indignity. But to my cousin, the problem was solved, and it seemed a small price to pay. And it did keep Pippa quiet for at least a short while.

Fast forward to this year (and each year since). As I packed my dog's vacation bag, I put the diapers in while apologizing to my



“I had a heart-to-heart with Winnie Lew, telling her that sometimes there are just things you have endure for the love of basketball and the beach.”

baby. When we arrived, I took Winnie Lew for a long walk, trying to make sure that she had no fluids left in her. Since the first visit, Winnie Lew has not tried to make her mark anywhere . . . but diapers remain. I put her duckie diapers on, and we headed into the house. It seems that Winnie Lew has put some pounds on since the original purchase and the duckies were a little snug. I was constantly having to pull up her diapers on this visit which earned her the new nickname “pants on the ground.” POTG dutifully wore the diapers while managing to ignore Pippa the Yapper. While there, I ordered a larger set of diapers for our next visit.

But last weekend, something remarkable did happen. My cousin’s middle yorkie, Mia, who had always been Switzerland in the Winnie Lew-Pippa cold war, started following Winnie Lew around with what I can only describe as admiration. Pippa had been terrorizing her too, it seems, and she recognized a fellow soul who had taken action. Mia would sit

next to Winnie Lew on the couch looking at Pippa with “Now it’s a fair fight” in her eyes.

I must say, though, that Winnie Lew has accepted her fate with surprising dignity. When the new diapers arrived, I opted for a floral pattern this time—it seemed slightly less humiliating than the duckies. I looked for a basketball pattern with no luck, so daisies it is. The package promised “maximum comfort and mobility for the discerning canine,” which made me chuckle. As if Winnie Lew cared about fashion statements while enduring her beach house shame. “Look, girl. At least they’re your size this time,” I said, trying to sound upbeat.

Winnie Lew responded by turning her back to me and trotting to her bed, her dignity clearly wounded even at the mere sight of the contraptions. I swear that dog understands English better than some people I know. Now back at home, with the breeze blowing through her backside fluff while she does her business, my co-pilot thinks finally everything is “just duckie” again. 🐾



MEET AMY GEORGE

Amy George is an Episcopal priest in Selma, Alabama, where she shares an office with her volunteer pastoral care assistant, Winnie Lew. When not doing God’s work, you can find Amy doing Dog’s work—vacuuming a never ending supply of dog hair, chauffeuring Winnie Lew, and being the provider of endless dog treats. Amy feels blessed to have no fear of ever being attacked by squirrels, UPS delivery people, or small lizards.



A Good Dog Gone

BY ANN FULLER

My husband would just as soon slam on the truck's brake and catapult me into the windshield than hit a squirrel darting its way across our driveway. I can attest to this; it has happened.

He is an animal lover and will not so much as kill a bee or lizard that ventures unawares into our home. He will set anything free if it is within his power to do so.

I realize you are wondering why he debated the possum killing in a previous essay. I assure you that was only because he didn't want to see the possum suffer.

I don't recall our marriage vows specifically addressing more than "to love and to cherish, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, 'til death do us part." Apparently, my nervous groom and I missed the part about "I promise to bury every family pet in sunshine or rain, snow, sleet, or hail that meets its demise in my care."

After the third family pet went to glory, my husband said, "No more dogs. I don't think I can bury another one." I knew better.

During a gathering of neighborhood children in our den, someone suggested we get another dog. My eight-year-old son latched onto the idea, but I reminded him of his daddy's resolve not to have to say last rites for another four-legged friend that would inevitably morph into a family member.

With six squealing, bouncing kids in tow, I drove to the "pound." Chain-front cages lined both sides of the shelter, and most all of the occupants were cowering in corners or staring directly at us as if they had no expectations of ever escaping their confines. With one exception.

The straggly, dirty, tan-and-white mixed-terrier barked at us wildly with a look of anticipatory glee spreading across his face. The barking should have been the first red flag. He would bark at every doorbell ring for the next 15 consecutive Halloweens. By

my calculation, fifteen years of Halloweens with at least 35 doorbell rings per Halloween makes 525 barking tirades. That doesn't include friends, neighbors, March-of-Dimes volunteers, the Avon Lady, Jehovah Witnesses, and the Lion's Club salesman. If the doorbell rang, he barked. What a fine specimen this barking dog without a home—until now.

Returning from the pound with our new dog, we all gathered in the den to float suggestions for an appropriate name. I proposed we wait until the dog gave us some inclination as to his personality. But that didn't set well with the children who screamed the ubiquitous "Spot" and "Frisky" and "Benji." I admit the dog did resemble Benji of Disney movie fame. However diligent we were, not one name seemed to stick for this particular pooch.

The moment came when we heard my husband's truck pulling into the driveway. Suddenly, the room got ghostly quiet. All the children were well aware that the daddy of the house had said, in no uncertain terms, there would not be another dog. The back door opened. Not a peep emanated from the group.

Once in the den, my husband stopped short, surprised to see all the neighborhood children huddled so quietly. At first, he took no notice of the dog, but when he did, he glared at the tail-wagging pet, smiled, and said, "Well, hey there . . . SPORT!" The room exploded like cheering crowds at the Westminster Dog Show.

"That's it," the children shouted! "His name is Sport." Sport began to bark in agreement, and the legend was born.

Sport magically worked his way into our hearts. He was a "boy's dog" and slept with our son at night. He scampered alongside the neighborhood boys and girls playing bicycle chase. He was a frequent tagalong to the local quick mart.

Everyone knew and loved Sport. He got lollipops at the bank and frozen yogurt at TCBY. He dropped in occasionally at the elementary school to visit our son and daughter. In later years, he traveled to All-Star baseball games. He curled up beside me as a comforting snuggler, especially in times of crisis, like when my mother and father died within five months of one another.

My husband once boasted about having administered a "Dog IQ Test" to Sport. It was a test found in Reader's Digest, granted, but a test just the same. Not surprisingly, Sport's score placed him one step below genius. What proud parents we were! He had a vocabulary that consisted of some 29 words. Seriously.

Time ceases to exist for a rescue dog. Every minute and every hour of every day is a vacation. It doesn't matter if you go to the mailbox or to Miami for a month, the greeting is always the same. With Sport, like so many rescue dogs, his heart was exuding gratitude and unconditional love.

While Sport's love was unconditional for his family, I'm quite sure we loved him in return with equal measure, if not more. Sport savored every blessing, great or small, that came his way. He lavished us with affection and never complained.

The only time this fun-loving guy got into hot water was when he rolled in Eau de Parfum poop, his favorite fragrance. Once, Sport entered the back door and one of us drew a scowl and pointed a finger at him: "Ew, Sport, you've rolled in dog poop again!"

He answered with the most brilliant maneuver: he went straight to the bathtub, leaped over the edge, and settled himself for what he knew would be the consequence. The only problem was that he often jumped into the "guest" bathtub. Again came a scolding:

"Sport, you're in the wrong tub!" Wrong tub? No problem. Out he jumped and made his way into the master bathroom tub. How smart is that? One step below genius.

Sport participated in all the major events that made up the intricacies of our lives, from birthday parties to the magic of Christmas to sleepovers to movie nights. When the day came for our son to get a driver's license, I was happy for my son's rite of passage, but a bit melancholy. I realized that the chapter of life and love of that once ten-year-old boy, the freedom of his bike, and his dog were forever gone.

Sport managed to live a long, magnanimous life. We bragged that he was the oldest patient (age 19) at the veterinary clinic. Inevitably, his steps faltered; his hearing and eyesight failed. We treated him with an overabundance of love and compassion. He managed to get his favorite food with only a glance in our direction: vanilla ice cream topped with sharp cheddar cheese. When his arthritis became debilitating and our veterinarian gave us one poor prognosis after another, it was clear Sport was running out of treatment options. As a last-ditch heroic effort, the vet suggested a heavy steroidal dosing. He said we would know immediately if the treatment worked. It was a miracle of sorts to see Sport rally and become his old self, but the treatment effects were temporary.

When at last we knew it was Sport's time, much thought went into ensuring the dignity of those last moments of his considerable life. We settled him quietly in our family room and placed his beloved vanilla ice cream with cheese before him like a last communion. My husband and I, our now-adult son, and Dr. Mike were all there beside Sport.

We whispered our prayers, kissed him goodbye, and loosened the bond we made

with him so many years ago; memories, like taut fabric, woven into all of us. Dr. Mike injected that sweet, long-suffering dog, who, we knew, instantaneously romped and barked his way through the heavenly gates, or wherever it is that canine greatness goes.

**IF ONLY WE HUMANS
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ANOTHER. HOW PEACEFUL
THE END CAME TO SPORT.
HIS EYES CLOSED FOREVER
EVEN BEFORE THE NEEDLE
WAS REMOVED FROM HIS
TENDER, SHAGGY BODY.
A GOOD DOG GONE,
SURROUNDED BY THOSE
WHO LOVED HIM BEST.**

As for the burial, Sport was laid to rest with many other once-loved family pets just below a small hill and under a shade tree on our property.

My husband lovingly wrapped Sport's body in an appropriate blanket which pictured the American flag. After all, he was the quintessential All-American dog, the dog our boy loved so dearly throughout childhood, adolescence, and into adulthood.

While carrying Sport in his arms to the gravesite, his tears unconcealed, my husband turned to me and asked, "Do you want to bury him facing east where Christ will return, or toward the west so that he is facing our home?"

Without the slightest hesitation or doubt, I replied, "To the west, so he faces home." A good dog gone, but one who knew his place, his home. 🐾

May Munchies Sunny Snacks For Your Springtime Pup



May brings longer days, blooming gardens, and more time outdoors with your favorite furry companion. It's the perfect season to treat your dog to fresh, healthy, homemade goodies that celebrate the joy of spring. These two recipes are easy to make and full of flavor—your pup will be begging for seconds!

1. HONEY OAT DOG COOKIES

A simple, crunchy biscuit with a touch of sweetness that's perfect for a spring snack.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 1/2 cups oat flour
- 1/2 cup rolled oats

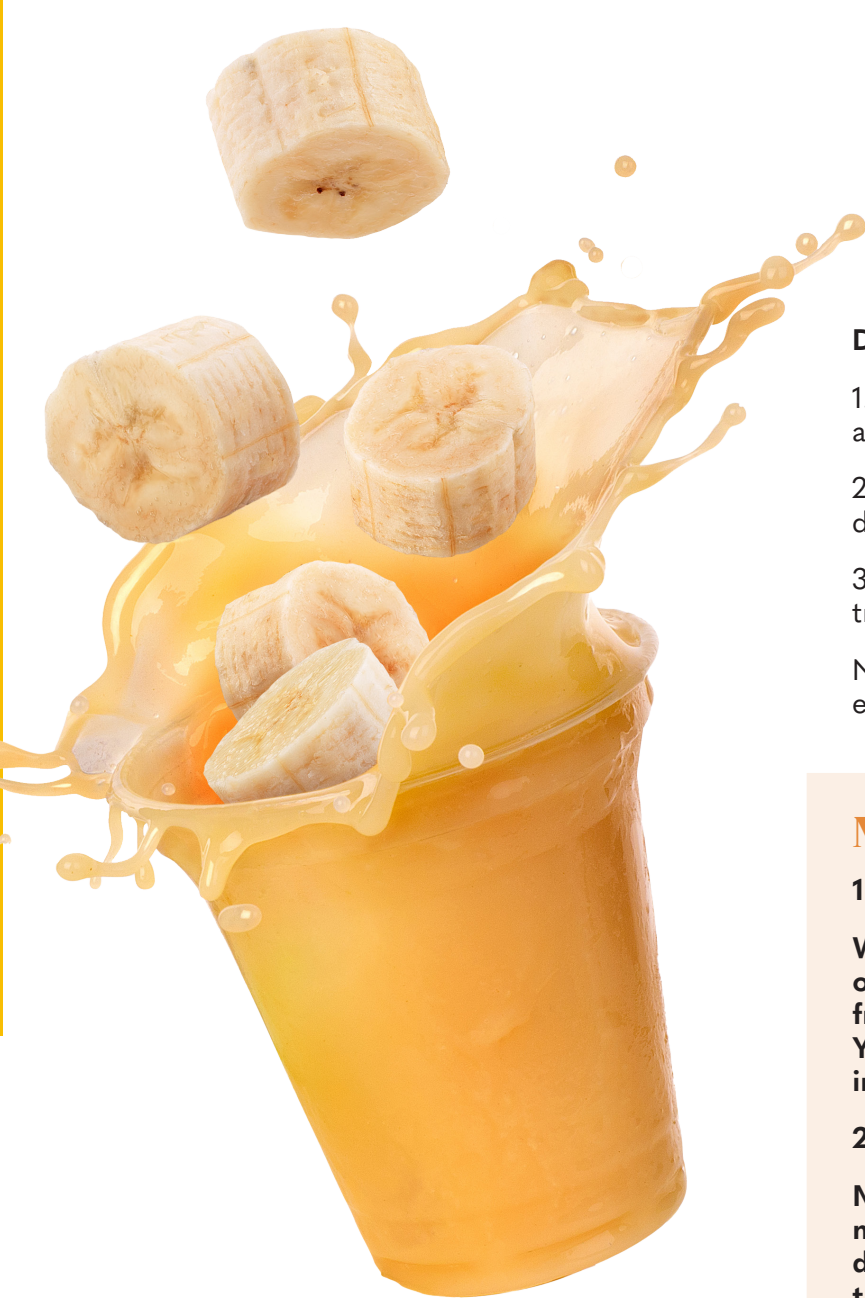
- 1 egg
- 1 tbsp honey
- 1/4 cup water (plus more as needed)

DIRECTIONS:

1. Preheat the oven to 325°F (165°C).
2. In a bowl, mix the oat flour, oats, egg, and honey. Add water a tablespoon at a time until a dough forms.
3. Roll out the dough and cut into small shapes using cookie cutters.
4. Place on a parchment-lined baking sheet and bake for 20–25 minutes until crisp and golden.
5. Cool completely before serving.

Storage: Store in an airtight container for up to 2 weeks.





2. TROPICAL PUP SMOOTHIE

A refreshing and healthy way to cool down after a sunny play session!

INGREDIENTS:

- 1/2 banana, frozen and sliced
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh pineapple
- 1/4 cup plain Greek yogurt
- 1/4 cup water

OPTIONAL TOPPINGS:

- Blueberries
- A few small dog biscuits

DIRECTIONS:

1. Blend banana, pineapple, yogurt, and water until smooth.
2. Pour into a small bowl and top with dog-safe extras like blueberries.
3. Serve immediately as a spoon-fed treat or a lickable snack in the shade!

Note: Always supervise your dog when eating smoothie bowls to avoid messy paws.

May Tips For Dog Parents

1. HYDRATION IS KEY

Warmer days mean more playtime outside—but don't forget to bring fresh water on your walks and outings. You can even freeze dog-safe broths into cubes for a hydrating treat.

2. FLEA & TICK CHECK

May is the start of flea and tick season in many regions. Make sure your dog is up to date on preventatives, and always check their fur after hikes or grassy romps.

3. GARDEN SAFETY

If you're planting flowers or veggies, remember that some plants (like azaleas and onions) are toxic to dogs. Keep your pup out of garden beds and stick with dog-safe greenery.

4. HOMEMADE TREAT GIFTING

May includes Mother's Day. Why not bake a batch of pup treats to gift to a fellow dog mom? Wrap them in a cute bag or tin with a personalized tag. 🐾

Say TREATS!



**Hey Paw-
Tographers!**

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