



Automatic leave it

The traditional way of teaching 'leave it' relies on us giving our dogs a cue. But I guarantee they're going to spot that chicken leg on the floor before you do, which sometimes means they're halfway through scoffing before you've told them to 'leave it'. This method teaches them to leave food automatically without a verbal cue.

How to Play:

1. With food in a closed fist, hold your hand out in front of you, at least a foot from the dog's nose, and immediately with the other hand toss one piece of food away from you for them to chase.

The aim is to throw a food reward to them **before** they move towards the food.

Repeat this step until they are staying back, or even stepping backwards in anticipation of the thrown treat.

2. With treats on your palm, hold your hand out flat. Use your other hand to feed you dog one treat at a time from that hand rapidly enough that they don't get a chance to come close to your hand. You shouldn't need to close your fist because you should be feeding quickly enough that they don't come close.

3. Once you have a dog that isn't diving for what is in front of them, you can slow the rewards down. Continue to reward for staying away from you, backing away, offering sits or downs, anything that isn't diving for the food. If you see failure, you're likely dropping the rate of reward too low and asking for too much too soon!

If they keep creeping forward, reward further back until they start to 'get it'.

4. The next step is to place treats quietly on an elevated surface, ready to cover it if they go for it (though ideally we'll progress slowly enough that that won't happen!). Make sure there is at least a foot of space between the dog and the treats. Start with throwing one treat at a time away from the pile like we did in step one.

5. Repeat steps 2 and 3 with the treats on the elevated surface instead of your hand. Do the same thing you did with the flat hand.

6. When this is going well, have the treat pile on the floor in front of you. Your aim is to feed so much for not being at or going toward the pile that your dog does not try to get the pile. Progress slowly and keep your reward rate high! This should look just like the one on the elevated surface.

7. Place a treat on the floor in front of you and then when that's easy, drop one from just an inch, and then progress slowly from there, always controlling that it doesn't roll and bounce toward them.

8. Then you can add a simple drop. Start far from them and low to the ground so the food doesn't roll right into them. You need to control things here and not let them be on that edge of diving for it. Don't be in a rush to get to this stage! Give them plenty of practice at the other steps so this one is simple and they're just not tempted.



9. If they're doing really well you can make it harder by standing up to drop the treat, or standing closer to them.

10. Now drop piles! Same idea, but with more food! You'll want to make sure your dog is an expert at all the previous steps before getting this far.

Smashed step 10? Time to try walking past things that are on the ground, or past things that you drop.

Moving around makes everything more difficult, so increase the distance from the piles of food to start with and work on lead so they can't get the food.

Practise in the house, in the garden, and then out on walks with set ups. This skill takes lots of practise but is invaluable for scavengers.

If they happen to spy some treasure on the floor and choose to look at you instead make sure you throw a party and give them the best reward you have on you