



# Dog Chat

Brought to you by  
Illawarra Dog Training Club



**October/November 2018**

# Christmas Edition



## **Executive Committee Members**

<b>President</b>	Linda Thomas
<b>Vice President</b>	Tony Gardiner
<b>Chief Instructor</b>	Mark Johnston
<b>Treasurer</b>	Carol Zietsch
<b>Secretary</b>	Danielle Zietsch

## **Committee Members**

George Bartolo	Kyle Charnock
Dave Cooper	Phil Rath
Fiona Moulton	Lorraine Lipman
Geoff Taylor	

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<b>Kyle Charnock</b>	<b>Carol Zietsch</b>		

## **Instructors**

<b>Mark Johnston</b>	<b>Linda Thomas</b>	<b>Tony Gardiner</b>	Dave Cooper
Phil Rath	George Bartolo	Lorraine Lipman	Geoff Taylor
Larissa Woods	Pam Townsend	Fiona Moulton	John Hallett
Heather Kennedy	Kat McGuiggan	David Chester	Chris Dowling
Vikki Geraghty			

# Ground Rules

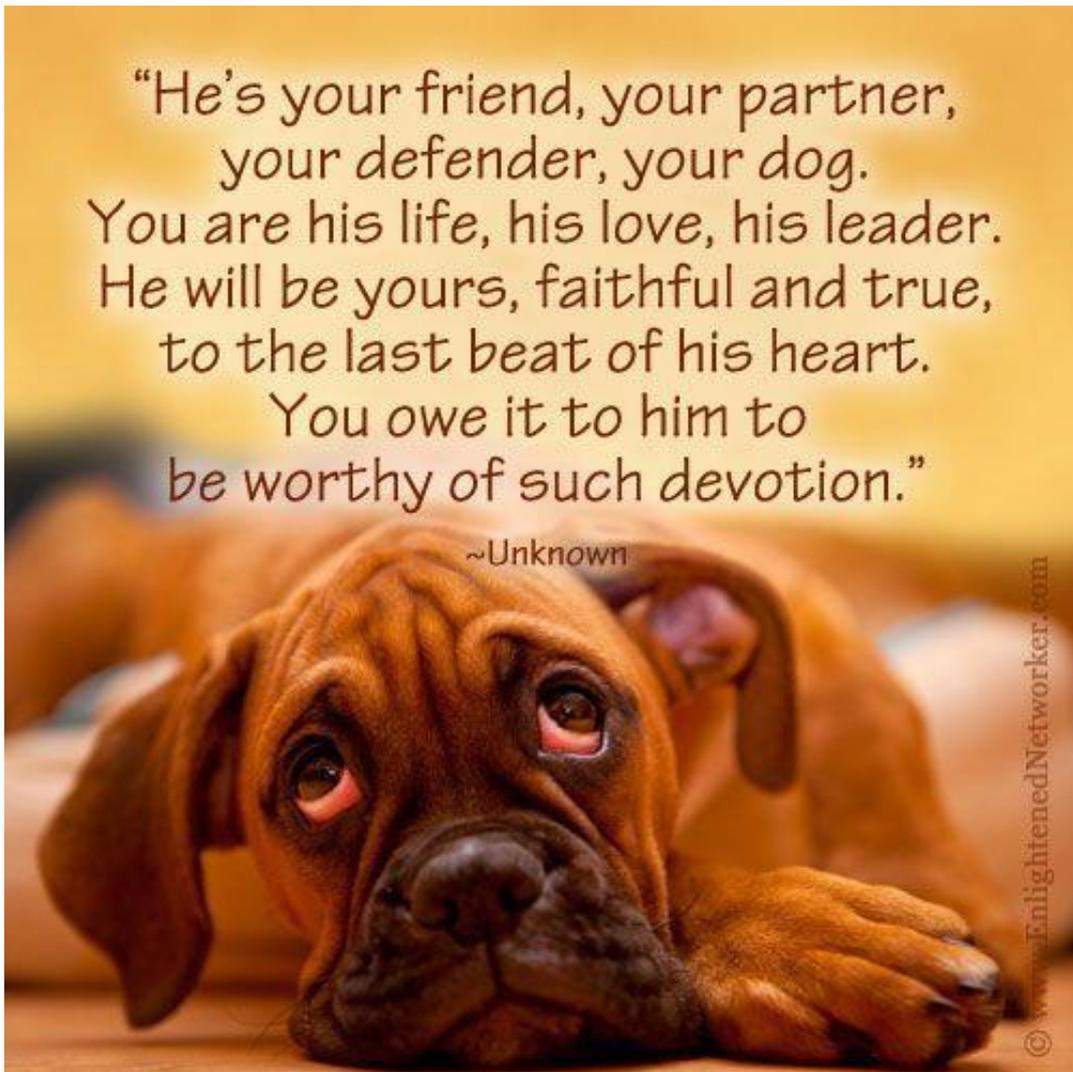
- Dogs are to be kept on leads at all times, unless in training class and under direct supervision of an instructor
- Dogs are not to be tied to the club house or trees
- Bitches in oestrus (season) shall not be permitted on the grounds while training is in progress
- Classes using club equipment will be responsible for returning this equipment to the correct storage place under the supervision of the class instructor
- Parking on ground is for instructors and workers on that day only. Cars are to be parked no closer to the club house than the southern boundary fence of the electrical sub station
- Pick up your dog's droppings if they foul the ground. Plastic bags are available to ensure responsible disposal
- Be on the alert for other instructors requiring assistance in training their own dogs
- Do not automatically use equipment set up on the ground. It may have just been set up by an instructor who is in the process of preparing to use it. They may also be in the process of using it, but not necessarily in the immediate vicinity
- Equipment such as jumps and obstacles, are not for general use without supervision
- Children are to be kept away from dogs pegged near volunteers cars for both children and dogs safety
- Children are not permitted in class with parents

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*“He’s your friend, your partner,  
your defender, your dog.  
You are his life, his love, his leader.  
He will be yours, faithful and true,  
to the last beat of his heart.  
You owe it to him to  
be worthy of such devotion.”*

*~Unknown*



# Chief Instructors Report

## October/November 2018

We have had a couple of quiet months of training during October and November averaging about 61 dogs on the ground at training, including a couple of weeks of bad weather where we had < 50 dogs on the ground. Again we have worked hard at maintaining promotions so members can progress their training.

As instructors we need to have a clear understanding of the mechanics of each exercise and are able to demonstrate the exercise so that members understand exactly HOW to perform the exercise, if the exercise is performed consistently, with patience, and perseverance, the dog will eventually understand what is required. We need to remember that we are training PEOPLE, so they can improve their communication with their dogs.

Please also stress the importance of consistency to our members; dogs don't understand "sometimes", or "occasionally" or "on a Saturday at training".

The mechanical issues I encounter regularly on the grounds would be

Repeating of commands – 1 cue -> 1 action

Dogs name - if you say it in front of every command it's just noise

Correcting the dog using its name – why would you want their name to associate with anything undesired.

Tugging on the lead – nearly always used as an unconscious signal or correction for sit?

I also have some reminders for members,

Yellow Bandannas. We want ALL our members to enjoy the time spent on the grounds with their dog, so just a general reminder to look out for dogs that are wearing yellow bandannas, these bandannas indicate the dog is uncomfortable near dogs OR PEOPLE and the owner of the dog should be consulted before approaching.

**We are our dogs advocate and we can certainly opt out of interactions if we feel it is not in our dog's interest.**

Covered Shoes - JJ Kelly is a public park through the week, so even though we inspect the grounds before training, we can't be completely sure of what surprises we might find on the grounds, it is a club requirement that all people training are wearing covered shoes.

As always A BIG Thank You to Instructors and Helpers who were able to give up their time during the last 2 months, your assistance is much appreciated by both members and me.

The Diggers visit for October was attended by Dave and Carol with Evie and Annie. November was attended by Larissa with Sinn and Molly and me with Kaos.

Thanks Mark

First Name	Dog Name	Breed
JOSHUA	SHADO	ENGLISH STAFFORDSHIRE TERRIER
VANESSA	SAMMY	MINI CAVOODLE
JANE	GLEN	GREYHOUND
ANDREW		
NATHAN	MISTY	TERRIER X
JOSEPHNE	OREA	BORDER COLLIE X LABRADOR
JOEL	TILLY	STAFFORDSHIRE TERRIER X
STEPHANIE	MONTY	TOY POODLE
MELISSA	PIXEL	CHIHUAHUA
SILVIA	CHISEL	BORDER COLLIE
TERRY	POLLY	KELPIE X
JULIE	ZAHRA	ENGLISH STAFFORDSHIRE BULL TERRIER
RACHEL	OLLIE	BORDER COLLIE X WOLFHOUND
PAUL		
JOSH	MISHKA	SIBERIAN HUSKY

## **Welcome To Our New Members**

First Name	Dog Name	Breed
MICHELLE	GEORGE	LABRADOODLE
CALLAN		
ADAM	BENJI	LABRADOODLE
ANNE		
KATH	LUNA	LABRADOR
ALEX	FUZZ	MINIATURE DASCHUND
SHERIN	DAISY	LABRADOODLE
KATELYN	PIPP	MALTESE X POODLE
GLENYS	SMASH	BLUE CATTLE DOG
ELLIE	ARLO	BORDER COLLIE
RENEE	HOLLY	GOLDEN RETRIEVER
HANNAH		
ALYSSA	DAISY	CATTLE DOG/POINTER
BRENDA	CHILLI	JAPANESE SPITZ
GREG	BONNIE	CAVALIER KING CHARLES SPANIEL
TIZIANA	SOOKIE	AMERICAN STAFFY
TABANI		
JAMES	JINDY	GROODLE



# Promotions

## **Class 1 Basic to Class 2 Stabilising:**

To be able to be promoted from class 1 to class 2 you and your dog must be able to complete the following exercises

1. Your dog is comfortably walking next to your left leg.
2. Your dog is able to sit next to your left leg on command.
3. Your dog is able to stand next to your left leg on command
4. You are able to call your dog back to you on lead and continue walking.
5. You are able to complete left and right turns successfully
6. You are able to complete left and right about turns successfully.
7. Your dog can sit and stay with you standing beside it, in position for 30 seconds.

Handling the lead with 2 hands on most of the time, and using the lead to position the dog.

At this stage it is much more important that the handlers mechanics are good – giving clear commands, guiding the dog as necessary, and praising the dog. If the dog makes a mistake and is effectively guided by the handler this is a positive.

## **Class 2 Stabilising to Class 3 Challenge:**

To be able to be promoted from class 2 to class 3 you and your dog must be able to complete the following exercises

1. Your dog is comfortably walking next to your left leg.
2. Your dog is able to sit next to your left leg on command.
3. Your dog is able to stand next to your left leg on command
4. You are able to complete left and right turns successfully.
5. You are able to complete left and right about turns successfully.
6. You are able to call your dog back to you and get them to place finish as one exercise.
7. Your dog can calmly work at fast pace with you.
8. Your dog can sit and stay with you standing in front, in position for 30 seconds.
9. Your dog can stand and stay with you standing beside it, in position for 30 seconds.

At this stage it is expected that to sit and stand, very little guiding is necessary (< 3 out of 5 times)

Still walking using the lead to position the dog, giving feedback to the dog when it is in position

### **Class 3 Challenge to Class 4 Finishing:**

To be able to be promoted from class 3 to class 4 you and your dog must be able to complete the following exercises

1. Your dog must be able to walk comfortably next to your left leg using a loose leash.
2. Your dog must be able to drop next to your left leg on command.
3. You are able to complete left and right turns successfully
4. You are able to complete left and right about turns successfully
5. You are able to call your dog back to you on lead and have them sit directly in front of you.
6. You are able to get your dog to do a place finish as a separate exercise
7. You are able to get your dog to successfully complete an off lead recall to front on command.
8. Your dog can calmly work with you at slow pace.
9. Your dog can sit and stay with you standing in front, in position for 30 seconds, returning around your dog
10. Your dog can stand and stay with you standing in front, in position for 30 seconds
11. Your dog can stay in the down with you standing beside it in position for 30 seconds.

At this stage it is expected that to sit and stand and drop come and place, very little guiding is necessary (< 3 out of 5 times)

Still walking on lead but with a loose leash the majority of the time



**Congratulations to the following club members on their promotion Class 1 Basic to Class 2 Stabilising:**

Chantal and Spud	Kiran and Bowie	Joe and Quake	Vanessa and Rumble
Chris and Dixie	Nathan and Misty	Kathryn and Juno	Dallas and Mac
Warwick and Orlando	Joel and Tilly	Kim and Archie	Melissa and Pixel
Kieran and Sally	Danielle and Georgy	Stacey and Juno	Reuben and Vinnie
Jarrad and Pablo	Barbara and Tallis	Jason and Odi	Georgia and Zoe
Jimmy and Rubi			

**Congratulations to the following club members on their promotion Class 2 Stabilising to Class 3 Challenge:**

Per and Hjartat	Joe and Quake	Nathan and Misty	Mohsen and Shadow
Mathew and Ranger	Maureen and Bruno	Warwick and Orlando	Amanda and Molly
Marnie-Ruth and Digger		Emma and Stormy	Vanessa and Rumble
Joe and Kane	Phil and Maple	Ellie and Arlo	

**Congratulations to the following club members on their promotion Class 3 Challenge to Class 4 Finishing:**

Jess and Alannah	Terri and Achilles	Jimmy and Remi	Lisa and Sasha
Liz and Marlon	Catherine and Dita	Jaci and Pip	



# Trial Results

## ***Eastern Suburbs 29/9/18***

Tony and Ash      CDX    187points      3rd Place

## ***Penrith 30/9/18***

Tony and Ash      CDX    186points      1st Place

## ***State Titles 1/10/18***

Tony and Ash      CDX    171points      Triple Qualifier Medal

## ***Southern Highlands 20/10/2018***

Carol with Cruze CD    197points      1<sup>st</sup> place



## **“Lady” a second chance ©**

A mixture of chance and curiosity was behind the reason Lady entered my life. Back then I worked as a vet nurse in Caringbah for veterinarians husband and wife team Bob Hazard & Beryl Botte. One morning I was asked to fetch a dog other than her name Lady information was unavailable she had arrived after my 5:30pm shift. Most common problems were either skin related, accidents of a kind or run-over because dogs had freedom to roam their neighbourhoods. Lady's healthy glow made me speculate desexing. She had a happy friendly temperament appearing on the cubby side her black soft woolly coat a dead giveaway to poodle heritage. After being placed on the bench Lady and I became acquainted as the vet fiddled around preparing a needle. His tendency detailing the procedure was missing he appeared restraint causing an odd atmosphere. Curiosity got the better of me and I wanted to know if she was to be desexed? No he answered, he desexed her a few years ago. In his next breath divulged that the owner was moving to Melbourne and requested Lady be put down. The answer a shock I was effective convincing him not to give Lady the lethal injection construing valid reasons why my mother would allow me to take Lady home. Knowing how good mum was for a sob story on top of that Lady was her type of dog. The vet promised to contact the owner on my behalf Lady's life now lay in the lap of the gods. It was very unusual for the family to be without a dog, Rex the Boxer strayed awhile back and so far had not been replaced.

Lady and I left the surgery in a hurry the following day not to miss the 5:40 train or we would have to wait another 30 minutes. When I got home it was out the door to feed the horse leaving Lady with mum to get acquainted. It must have been love at first sight because mum announced Lady will be an inside dog. Lady crawled under my bed that first night and seemed to prefer sleeping there most nights. During the day Lady had a bed in the laundry after Rex strayed my parents invested in a side fence. One day Mrs Freeman next-door spotted Rex in Miranda shopping centre after purchasing her husband a belt for his birthday then was forced to use it on Rex as a leash. The usual practice back then a stray dog could easily end up with a new owner. Rex's persona indicated to everyone he was his or her new best friend and one day failed returning home. He completely vanished nobody had seen Rex and nobody answered the lost and found add in the local paper.

Lady was anything but athletic in appearance yet could jump over the fence soon discovered by default. At first we thought one of my sister's friends must have been letting her out the gate. One day I put the horse in the backyard Lady seemed frightened of his presence and leap-frogged over a metre high fence as if she had invisible wings.

Lady was a gentle and endearing type of dog that quickly charmed the neighbours when left home alone. She loved company if nobody was home she went people searching. Each time Mrs Freeman next door did her ironing Lady was there on her kitchen floor snoozing. Mrs Summers a couple of doors down often had afternoon tea in the garden Lady would be there to enjoy not only Mrs Summers company but possibly begged for a biscuit or two. It was a mystery how Lady convinced cranky Mrs McDuffie from across the road to allow her to sit in her lounge room and entertain three under school age children. Whenever we arrived home Lady was mainly on the front porch waiting and never in the backyard where she was supposed to be. Apparently she only jumped over the fence one-way.

My best friend's mother owned Tiffany's grooming parlour and Lady was picked up and delivered home fully clipped whenever her woolly coat demanded. In Lady's case her clipped body was not a good look suggesting she needed to join weight watchers. Besides mum others slipped her, a biscuit or two Lady had a cute way begging and easily persuaded anyone with good intensions to do otherwise. The only exercise she received was the back-shop or to go feed the horse if forgetting to tie her up she would skedaddle off home. And one time at the paddock she picked up an unnoticed tick. After she began to stagger in her back legs the local vet responded rushing straight out to give her an injection that worked magically. From then on Lady was banned from the paddock not a fan of horses it probably made her day however not good for her waistline.

When Lady eventually went to doggy heaven my mother was distraught my father took advantage of the circumstances and brought Timmy home on a train journey from the city. Knowing my mother's partiality to small dogs he proclaimed Timmy to be a miniature foxy cross. Timmy was only tiny from being weaned much too early and dad possibly picked one of the smaller pups in the litter. Timmy like Lady became an inside dog because he was young, tiny and would not grow big, so mum thought. Dad purposely left out the bit about Timmy's mother being a purebred German shepherd his work colleague thought a Kelpie cross might be the father. He knew mum would say no in a raised tone avoiding World War three he when with the fib. Dad liked German shepherd's knowing mum's negative opinion about the breed. They once owned an Alsatian that dad got from a mate with a dodgy temperament that had to be put down at young age. Timmy was black with a bit of white on his neck hence how he got away impersonating a foxy for a sort time. By the time Timmy shot up to German shepherd size, *one had to be totally blind not to see the resemblance*. Mum of course had already fallen in love with Timmy that turned out a super smart dog. He grew into a fantastic watchdog that had to be locked away in their bedroom when guests arrived and lived well into his teens. Dad thought the Timmy situation hilarious taking great delight pushing his luck to the limit joking at mum's expense how she was fooled.



# **Doggie Treat of The Month**

## **Heavenly Health Dog Biscuits**

### **Ingredients**

- 1  $\frac{3}{4}$  cups rolled oats
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup golden flax seeds
- $\frac{2}{3}$  cup brewers' yeast
- 1 cup shredded Cheddar cheese
- 1 cup brown rice flour
- 2 cups oat bran flour
- 2 tablespoons organic raw sugar
- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1  $\frac{3}{4}$  cups low salt chicken broth
- 2 eggs



### **Directions**

1. Preheat oven to 165 degrees C
2. Combine oats, flax seeds, brewer's yeast, cheese, rice flour, oat bran flour and sugar in a large bowl. Whisk together chicken broth and eggs; mix with oat mixture to make a fairly stiff dough.
3. Roll dough into 1 inch balls, and then flatten into discs. Or roll out dough onto a floured surface to  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch thick and cut with cookie cutters
4. Bake until dry and the edges turn a light golden brown, 40 to 45 minutes. Cool before serving

# Fireworks Safety

## for pets



**Keep your pets secured INSIDE your home.** Even dogs in fenced yards find ways to escape the scary sounds.

**Give them a safe place to hide.** Set up a comfortable room or crate in your house just for them.

**Use ambient noise to mask the noise.** A radio or TV playing comforting music works well.

**Update their IDs & microchips** *(just in case).*

**Skip the celebration and stay home with them.** Sometimes your presence makes all the difference.

**Keep them busy.** Treat toys, like Kongs, can help distract them during the display.



# **Breed of The Month**

## **Alaskan Malamute**

The Alaskan Malamute, also called simply the Malamute and nicknamed the “Mal,” is one of the oldest Arctic sled-dog breeds. Its name comes from the Mahlemuts, an Inuit tribe that settled in north western Alaska long before it was part of the United States. This breed is sometimes confused with the Siberian Husky because of its similar type and colour. However, the Alaskan Malamute is much larger and has a more powerful build, a more outgoing disposition, a denser and harsher double coat and a bushier, plume-like tail, among other breed differences.

The Alaskan Malamute was recognized by the American Kennel Club as a member of the Working Group in 1935. Malamutes are best known for their intelligence, alertness, affection, curiosity, playfulness, strength and endurance. They are extremely popular with people who enjoy outdoor winter activities such as sledding, skijoring, backpacking and weight pulling. They also can excel in the conformation and performance show rings. They are wonderful companions and tend to bond with all family members and friends rather than being a “one-person dog.” They are not particularly good watch or guard dogs. They are prone to vocalizing with what is more of a howl than a true bark.

### **Personality**

Hardy working dogs, Alaskan Malamutes are really just great big puppies. Though they take their jobs pulling sleds or searching out lost humans very seriously, they love to run, romp and play and have a never-ending energy reserve. Their playful, easy-going nature and friendliness toward strangers makes them a great family companion.

### **Activity Requirements**

This breed requires a lot of activity in order to stay happy. Malamutes who do not get enough exercise will let their owner know by barking, howling, or becoming destructive. As sled dogs, their endurance is what makes them appealing. They can haul heavy loads for miles, requiring few stops for rest and food. As family dogs, their endurance means Alaskan Malamutes can become a challenge. At least one hour of vigorous exercise per day is recommended for this breed.

They should not be kept in a warm climate as they can dehydrate very easily. As the name suggests, this breed hails from the far north, and they love cold weather and playing in the snow. Malamutes should live in a house with a fenced in yard, as their yen for adventure can lead them to scale fences.

Families with children should welcome an Alaskan Malamute. They are patient enough to handle children climbing all over them, and energetic enough to keep up with children engaged in rumpus outdoor play. However, small children can be in danger of getting knocked over by a Malamute, so adult supervision is required.

## **Trainability**

Though they instinctively love to work, Alaskan Malamutes are difficult to train in the home. Independent and willful dogs, a patient, consistent hand is needed when working with this breed. They like to be in charge, so the moment they see an opening to manipulate a situation, Malamutes will take it.

Their high endurance level made them the ideal choice for sled races and northern expeditions. Admiral Byrd famously used Alaskan Malamutes in his North Pole expeditions because of their high energy and endurance levels. They are also used in search and rescue missions across the north, including avalanche missions.

## **Behavioural Traits**

Howling is guaranteed when an Alaskan Malamute is left alone, so families who live in close proximity to other people should think twice about adopting one. Separation anxiety is also common, as the Malamute loves to be with his people. Proper exercise and activity will prevent this problem from growing.

Food aggression is also common in the Alaskan Malamute, and difficult to train out of them. Children should be taught never to disturb this dog while he is eating.



# The Twelve Dangers of Christmas For Your Pets

## 1. Macadamia Nuts

Macadamia nuts are enjoyable all year round but they tend to be more common during this time of year. Macadamia nuts are toxic to dogs and cause hind limb lameness, pain and weakness. Even before they're out of the shell they can pose a threat to your dog. Every year vets see serious bowel blockages in dogs that have swallowed whole macadamia nuts in their shell.

## 2. Sticks

Despite the characteristic image of a dog playing fetch with a stick, vets often see terrible injuries to the back of dogs' throats when dogs accidentally run onto the stick as it lands on the ground. A stick can tear into the back of the throat and cause a horrible injury that is painful and difficult to explore and fix. In these circumstances dogs often need a CT scan to identify the extent of the wound and whether splinters are present. Stick to balls and Frisbees, they're much safer!

## 3. Chocolate

Yum! Who can resist chocolate? Most dogs can't! Cats aren't usually as curious about chocolate as dogs but it's really important to keep chocolate away from both. Dogs and cats are VERY sensitive to the chemicals in chocolate. It can make them agitated and jittery, their hearts race dangerously fast, and can even cause seizures. Different types of chocolate present different dangers so please make sure only the humans enjoy it. In particular make sure children are aware as they may think they're giving their pet a Christmas treat by offering them chocolate.

## 4. Onions and Garlic

Although we all love the flavour provided by these tasty veggies, they are dangerous for pets causing damage to red blood cells in dogs and cats causing severe anaemia. This means they don't have enough red blood cells to provide oxygen to their vital organs. They may be lethargic, have pale or even yellow gums and have rapid or difficulty breathing

## 5. Heatstroke

While people sweat when they get hot, dogs can't. Instead, dogs pant to regulate their temperature. Dog breeds with a short nose and noisy breathing such as Bulldogs, Pugs and French Bulldogs have more trouble panting effectively in hot or humid weather and can be at risk of heat stroke on hot days. Exercise during hot or humid weather during the summer months can put dogs at risk of overheating. It is important to avoid excessive exercise in the hottest part of the day. Signs of heat stroke include agitation, excessive and continuous panting, vomiting, diarrhoea and collapse. Despite their desert origins, cats also suffer from heat. Cats can sweat through the pads on their feet but that's not much so panting. Excessive grooming or restlessness can be signs they are too hot

## 6. Ticks

Paralysis ticks are found on the eastern seaboard of Australia and are most common from spring to autumn. They can attach to dogs and cats and cause paralysis which can be life threatening. Signs include high-pitched bark in dogs, weakness or wobbly hind legs, retching and regurgitation and eventually complete collapse. Even if ticks do not tend to occur around where you live, it is important to be aware of these horrible parasites especially if you are in bushy coastal areas. It is really important to see your veterinarian to get good preventative products. However, no product is 100% effective and there is no substitute for regular manual searches to detect and remove paralysis ticks.

## 7. Alcohol

During the festive season there is plenty of alcohol around and while humans should drink responsibly, dogs and cats cannot be given alcohol. Dogs and cats are very sensitive to alcohol toxicity and even seemingly small amounts can cause death. Pets can also develop alcohol toxicity from eating uncooked rising bread dough, which can contain alcohol from the fermenting yeast.

## **8. Grapes and Sultanas**

Grapes, raisins and sultanas are only toxic to some dogs, but there is no way of knowing which ones! Unfortunately, once they have eaten them we have to assume they are going to be toxic, as there is no way of knowing until it is too late. Grapes cause the kidneys to stop working which can be life threatening. Christmas pudding is a rich source of raisins and sultanas so you should keep your dogs away from this.

## **9. Snakes**

At this time of year people and pets are more active and so are snakes. It is very important to be aware of snakes in your area and try to keep dogs and cats away from them. Signs of snakebites can develop hours after the initial bite so always seek immediate veterinary advice if you suspect your pet has been bitten.

## **10. Brunfelsia and Lilies**

Although a very pretty plant in the garden, the 'Yesterday Today Tomorrow' plant is severely toxic to dogs. Dogs seem to love the flavour, especially the seed pods, but it causes severe tremors and seizures. Often, affected dogs will pass the toxic seeds in their stool. Indoor flowers are popular decorations at this time of year but if you have cats then avoid Lilies. The orange-brown pollen in the flowers is highly toxic and can be fatal to cats. They don't even need to eat it. Even if they walk under them and some pollen drops onto their coat they'll consume it when they groom themselves

## **11. Christmas Decorations**

Some dogs and a lot of cats love playing with Christmas decorations and this can lead to serious problems. Some decorations can be swallowed and lead to serious intestinal obstructions, which may require surgery. Some ingested Christmas foreign bodies that we have seen causing major problems include tinsel which causes the intestines to bunch dangerously, string bags full of chocolates and even baubles! Christmas lights can also be a hazard because your pets can chew them, which can lead to electrocution.

## **12. Fatty Foods**

At this time of year there are numerous delicious, treats around. Unfortunately, any rapid changes to your pet's diet such as scavenging for scraps, means there is the potential for gastrointestinal upsets such as vomiting and diarrhoea. Fatty foods like barbeque scraps, turkey skin or pork crackling can lead to more serious pancreatitis. Major signs of pancreatitis are lethargy, poor appetite, abdominal pain, vomiting and fever. Despite the temptation to share these tasty treats with your pet, it's important to avoid that and stick to their normal diet.



# The Dangers of Grass Seeds for Dogs

Amongst the Australian veterinary community, spring and summer are known as grass-seed season. This is when many dogs seek veterinary care for medical problems caused by grass seeds.

It's hard to imagine that a simple grass seed can cause issues but **they are a big problem for dogs in many areas of Australia**. In one recent study from south west rural NSW, 2% of the dogs seen at veterinary clinics during spring and summer came in because of grass seeds. Medical issues ranged from **mild swelling to life-threatening illness**.

## What grass seeds are causing the problem and how?



In Eastern Australia, the grasses that cause the most issues are **Spear Grass, Barley Grass, and Wild Oats**.

In Western Australia, **Brome Grass** also causes problems. All share the characteristic of having **sharp pointy seed heads**.

The **part of the grass that causes the problem is the awn**. This is a hard case that surrounds the seed. They have a sharp spikey head and an arrow shape with bristles that point backwards. The shape helps the grass self-propagate.

The sharp point enables it to bury into soil whilst the arrow head bristles prevent it from coming out again. Moisture in the soil also causes the awn to swell to keep it in the soil.

The problem is, when the awns get caught in the fur of dogs, the seeds easily penetrate the skin surface. As in the soil, **their shape means they travel forwards but not**

**backwards.**

A dog's body is a lot less dense than soil, so once the seed enters the body it can keep travelling large distances, ending up in the bladder, lungs, spinal cord, and even the brain.

Symptoms depend on where the awn enters the body, what path it takes, and where it ends up.

## Why do grass seeds cause problems?

The **body recognizes the grass seed as foreign and tries to wall it off and remove it**. The grass seeds also naturally carry bacteria, which cause **infection**. This creates a strong inflammatory reaction, with pain, swelling, and pus. Technically, this inflammatory reaction is called an **abscess**.

The inflammation caused by the body as it tries to remove the grass seed and fight the infection causes damage to nearby structures. This inflammation can be disastrous in certain locations, such as within the lung, spinal cord, or brain.



It is **not uncommon for dogs to have multiple grass seeds embedded under the skin**. A common site is the paw. This shows up as a red, painful swelling on the foot, sometimes oozing pus. It will usually be quite painful and the dog will lick it a lot.

Another common site on the skin is around the head and neck. As well as piercing the skin, grass seeds can enter the body via the ears, eyes, nose, throat, vagina, and intestines.

Dogs are always sniffing with their noses to the ground. **Grass seeds frequently get snorted up the nose or inhaled** down the windpipe. Once inside the body, the seeds migrate. The seeds will take the path of least resistance.

For example, grass seeds that are inhaled go down to the lungs. There they cause pneumonia. From the lungs, the grass seeds tend to travel into the chest space (outside the lungs), then follow the diaphragm (the muscle between the chest and the abdomen) towards the spine, and travel up into the spinal cord. Such dogs will have **symptoms of spinal cord disease and may have trouble walking**. Grass seeds that enter the vagina frequently end up in the bladder and cause a bladder infection. [1-5]

Ears are another very common site for grass seeds. The study from rural NSW actually found that **47% of dogs with grass seeds coming to see a general vet actually had the grass seed stuck in their ear**. The grass seed not only causes irritation and infection but it can pierce the ear drum and cause infection inside the ear.

## **Risk factors**

Contrary to what you might think, **dogs with medium-length coats are actually at highest risk compared to dogs with short-haired or long-haired coats**. They are three times more likely than other dogs to have problems. It is not the length of coat that matters but the density. Medium-length coats have a higher density undercoat, which traps the grass awns and is more likely to hold them closely against the skin.

**Working dogs, who spend much time amongst the fields, are at particular risk**. Any dog that has access to farmland is twice as likely to be affected.



**Breeds reported to be at higher risk include:**

- Labrador Retrievers
- Border Collies
- Spaniels (of all types)
- Golden Retrievers
- Kelpies
- Shih Tzus

The **grasses that cause problems flower from October to December, mainly in response to rain.** So, more dogs are seen with grass seed issues following lots of rain in spring and summer.

## **Symptoms**

The symptoms of grass seeds depend on where they enter the body, where they travel in the body, and where they end up.

Grass seeds in the following sites, may cause these symptoms:

### **#1. Skin**

- Pain
- Swelling
- Licking the area constantly
- Oozing a bloody discharge
- Lameness



## #2. Ears

- Itchy, irritated ears
- Pus in the ear
- Head tilted to one side
- Shaking the head constantly

## #3. Nose

- Sneezing
- Discharge from the nose
- Blood from the nose
- Shaking the head
- Pawing or rubbing at the muzzle

## #4. Eyes

- Sore, red eye
- Swollen eyelids
- Mucky eye gunk

## #5. Inhaled into the windpipe

- Coughing
- Fever
- Tiredness
- Breathing quicker and harder
- Not eating
- Large glands in the neck

## #6. Spinal cord

- Trouble walking
- Decreased appetite
- Tiredness
- Trouble weeing
- (often follows pneumonia)

## Diagnosis

Diagnosis is usually **confirmed by retrieving the grass seed from the site, usually under anaesthetic**. Most vets will assume that any painful swelling on a dog during spring and summer, particularly **one that is oozing pus**, could be caused by a grass seed. This is especially so if the swelling is on the foot or if the coat has grass seeds attached.

For eyes and ears, grass seeds are very painful. The ear or eye will need to be examined under some form of sedation to find the seed. **Endoscopy** (using a tube with a camera attached) may be needed if a grass seed is suspected up the nose or down the throat.

For seeds inside the body, it can be very difficult to work out that a grass seed is causing the problem. Such dogs may come in with a **range of symptoms, such as a fever from pneumonia or trouble walking if the seed is in the spinal cord**. Many such cases end up being referred to veterinary specialists, sometimes weeks after the grass seed has entered the body.

An x-ray of the chest can identify pneumonia or pus in the chest but it won't be obvious that a grass seed is the cause. To identify a grass seed as the problem, it may be necessary to use other

tests. A CT (*computed tomography*) scan is frequently used. It mainly helps identify exactly where in the body the abscess is.

**Only in about 20% of cases is the grass seed obvious.** Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) may be used as well. Surgery is ultimately required to find and treat the abscess and remove the seed. This confirms the diagnosis.

An ultrasound can sometimes help find the grass seed in swellings that keep recurring under the skin.

## Treatment

Very occasionally, a grass seed will continue to travel until it comes out the other side of the leg or body. **In most instances, however, the seed needs to be surgically removed.** Abscesses need to be opened and drained to remove the pus and find the grass seed. It can be quite difficult to find the grass seed because it can disintegrate with the moisture. If it can't be found, the abscess is usually cleaned thoroughly with saline in the hope that that flushes the material out.

If the grass seed isn't found and is still in there, the chance of the abscess reforming is higher. Sometimes, all we can do is wait to see if an abscess will reform there or elsewhere and do repeat surgery to try and find the seed again. **Antibiotics are also often given to help fight the infection** as well as pain relief and an anti-inflammatory.

## Prevention

**The best thing you can do to prevent grass seeds embedding in your dog's skin is to groom (brush) your dog weekly.** In one study, clipping the fur and searching for grass seeds was found to be ineffective. However, weekly grooming made a big difference. This is not related to grooming the seeds out. Rather, it is because **grooming reduces the density of the undercoat.** It also reduces the number of cross-hairs. This decreases the chance of grass seeds sticking within the coat.

Breeds with long coats have a less dense undercoat. So, despite the long hair, the grass seeds don't tend to stick and don't cause as many problems.

Similarly, with long-haired cats, frequent grooming by the cats themselves reduces the cross-hairs and makes grass seeds less likely to stick. In fact, cats have the most problems with grass seeds going up their nose!

Clipping the fur can make weekly grooming much easier but **clipping should not be substituted for weekly grooming.**

If you do have a dog with dense hair around the bottom of their paws, such as Cocker Spaniels, I do recommend that you **clip the hair around the paws very short.** It won't necessarily stop grass seeds from getting in there but it **makes it much easier to find them** and identify problems.

For working dogs that wear muzzles, putting some coarse mesh over the top may help to prevent grass seeds from being inhaled.

**Mow your lawns after rain, before grass seeds form.** If you can, try not to allow your dog to walk through seeded grasses at this time of year. And if you do, **check their paws for seeds and groom them thoroughly afterwards.**

**On Behalf of the  
Executive Committee and  
all Instructors we'd like  
to wish you a safe and  
Merry Christmas and a  
wonderful New Year.  
We'll see you in 2019.  
Keep up the training!!**



# **Upcoming Events**

## **Puppy Prep Classes**

2 February 2019

2 March 2019

30 March (April Puppy Prep) 2019

4 May 2019

1 June 2019

6 July 2019

3 August 2019

7 September 2019

12 October 2019

9 November 2019

## **First Day of Training for 2019**

### **2<sup>nd</sup> February**



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