

How to Teach Your Dog Scent Work at Home - by Kathy Santo – May 27, 2020

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You don't have to own a [military or police K-9](#) to teach your dog how to recognize a scent. In fact, you don't even have to leave your house.

What Is AKC Scent Work?

[AKC Scent Work](#) is a sport that mimics the task of working detection dogs to locate a scent (e.g., explosives or narcotics) and communicate to the handler that the scent has been found. Scent Work is a positive, challenging activity that allows dogs the opportunity to use their strongest natural sense in a way that's fun, engaging, and that builds and strengthens a foundation of trust between the handler and dog.

Many dog clubs offer Scent Work or "nose work" classes, but if you're just looking to try it out or teach your dog a new skill, you can follow these instructions in your home.

What You Need for Scent Work Training

The first step in teaching your dog Scent Work from home is finding the necessary supplies. Almost [everything you'll need can be bought on Amazon](#) or found around your house.

- Birch essential oil
- Cotton swabs, cut in half
- Tweezers
- A small glass jar with a lid
- A “scent vessel” to hold the cotton swab. (An empty, cleaned mint tin with holes drilled in the lid will work to get started)
- Disposable gloves
- High-value treats
- A lidded, plastic container with holes drilled in the lid

Prep the Odor and Scent Vessel

1. In a room far away from where you're working with your dog, wear disposable gloves as you apply two drops of essential oil to each cotton swab. Place the scented cotton swabs in the glass jar.
2. Take the gloves off by turning them inside out, roll them in a newspaper, and put them in a trash can outside immediately.
3. Using your tweezers, take a cotton swab out of the jar and put it in the scent vessel.
4. Place your tweezers in a plastic bag and seal.

After the training session, you can reuse the cotton swab if your dog doesn't drool, and if food or soil doesn't contaminate them.



Introduce Your Dog to Identifying the Scent

1. Hold the tin in one hand and treat in the other, about a foot apart from each other.
2. When your dog finally stops smelling or licking your hand with the treat and investigates the hand with the tin, say “Yes” and reward him by bringing the food to the hand with the tin. Note: This is an important step. You must feed the dog at the source of the odor. If the dog continues smelling the tin, you can feed at the tin.
3. After a few reps, switch the tin to the other hand so the dog doesn’t rely on memory to know which hand to go to.
4. You’re ready to move on if your dog can correctly identify the scent in each hand within a few seconds, three times in a row.

Teach Your Dog to Find the Scent

1. Next, put the tin holding the scented cotton swab into the plastic container.
2. Repeat the same system, holding the box in your hand and waiting for the dog to indicate that he recognizes the scent. When he does, be sure to feed the dog at the box, like you did previously.
3. Once this is easily accomplished, place the box on the ground, between your feet, and repeat the above process.
4. Finally, you can place the box on the floor while your dog is in another room, and then bring him into the room and see if he can find it.

Scent Work Training Tips

When setting up, wear gloves, and always handle the cotton swab with tweezers.

The odor should always be “novel,” so don’t contaminate the environment with it. Be sure to dispose of everything that came in contact with the source odor properly (in a sealed plastic bag, preferably outside in a garbage can, away from where you’re training).

Choose a location to set up your odor that’s far away from where you’re training. I set up everything in a bathroom, with the door closed.

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