



Muzzle Training Your Dog

The thought of using a muzzle can be unsettling and sometimes controversial as they are often associated with “aggressive” dogs. Certain situations exist where a dog may be likely to bite a human or another dog due to fear, pain or a perceived threat. At one point in most dog’s lifetime, there may be a situation when an owner needs to use a muzzle. Think of a muzzle like a seatbelt. The seatbelt is there to prevent an injury in case of an accident or sudden difficult situation. A muzzle is the same: it is a way to prevent a problem. Dogs who have displayed aggressive behavior in the past should consult with a veterinarian, behaviorist or trainer and most canine professionals agree that it is a safe and humane method to manage aggression.

Muzzles are not an appropriate way to control barking or chewing and are meant to be used for short periods of time. Some basket muzzles are designed to allow dogs to pant, drink water and even receive treats; while soft muzzles, or those made from fabric, are less comfortable and don’t allow a dog to open its mouth. Basket muzzles are the best choice to use if a dog is going for a walk or run. A basket muzzle is more comfortable and can be worn for a longer period. Soft muzzles are usually used at the groomer or veterinarian office where a dog is being handled at close quarters for a short period of time.

Proper fit is important, and you may need to measure your dog’s muzzle, especially when ordering online. Teaching your dog to wear a muzzle comfortably will take time, sometimes up to a week, to make sure it is comfortable with each step.

The following instructions are for a basket muzzle.

1. Show your dog the muzzle and let them sniff it. Immediately reward with a high value treat for exploring the muzzle. Repeat several times and reward immediately if they touch their nose to the muzzle.
2. Tip the basket muzzle and place your hand over the bottom part so the treats don’t run out. Place several high value treats inside and let your dog put their head into the muzzle to eat them. They may stick their head back in several times to get the treats or keep it inside to eat them all at once. Alternately, you can place a scoop of peanut butter or cream cheese in the bottom of the muzzle for them to lick out. Repeat this for a few days until your dog willingly puts their head in the muzzle anticipating something good inside.
3. Repeat Step 2 and while your dog is eating the treats or peanut butter, calmly fasten the buckle. Remove it immediately when your dog finishes the treats. Repeat several times.
4. Next, repeat Step 3 but count to five before removing the muzzle.
5. Over the next few days, gradually increase the time your dog wears the muzzle. You can stick treats through the holes in the muzzle while wearing it to help increase your dog’s comfort.
6. Make sure your dog is very comfortable before stepping outdoors in the muzzle. Put on your dog’s leash and walk it around the house using a lot of praise and treats. Try the same thing outdoors in a quiet place such as a back yard before going on your regular walking route.

You may only need to use the muzzle for specific occasions or it may be something you need to walk your dog in a public place. Either way, make sure your dog has had plenty of time and training before wearing it in distracting situations. Remember to reward your dog every time you put the muzzle on it to make sure it is a pleasurable experience.