

Food Guarding

In the wild, dogs work together as a "pack" to get the food they need for survival. They would naturally protect the food they have captured because their survival depends on it. Domestic dogs are not much different, especially if food plays an important part in its daily activities. Gun dogs are a good example of breeds usually highly motivated by food.

The easiest way to teach a food orientated dog to become aggressive around its food bowl, is to try to keep taking it away, to see if you can. You are effectively letting the dog know you are unpredictable, a potential competitor and confirm to the dog you are not to be trusted at meal times. Have you ever had your meal taken away from you whilst eating? It isn't pleasant and you would soon become annoyed at a persistent offender.

The way to deal with dogs that guard food is to employ safety measures and bring about change by new associations. Always seek professional advice for specific food guarding problems from a qualified behaviour counsellor. Generally, improvements can be made by feeding the dog and completing these exercises in different rooms of the house, as food guarding can soon extend to room guarding. Have several empty bowls placed on the floor. Prepare the dog's food as normal and after having attached a house line (thin safety line) to the dog's collar, drop a handful of his food into the dish. When finished take your dog with the house line to another dish and empty another handful of food into the dish. Repeat this with all the dishes until to food has gone. After several days allow the dog a greater amount of food in his dish, whilst offering tastier morsels such as chicken strips or liver. Move from dish to dish, placing tasty morsel in each.

After several more days, the number of dishes can be reduced, with intermittent offerings being made at meal times. The dog's perception of approaches to the dish will begin to change from guarding to expectancy of reward. Due to the nature of food guarding problems, professional advice should always be sought.

Castration is often advised for aggression related problems. A possible side effect of castration is an increase of appetite; therefore with a food-guarding problem there is likelihood that problems such as this can be exacerbated following this routine procedure. Discuss these possibilities with your vet or behaviour counsellor.

