

DIY: Snuffle Mats for Canine Enrichment and Sniffing

By Liz Palika, October 2017, Updated February 2018

Dogs take to scent games like, well, fish to water. Enter the Snuffle Mat, a homemade toy that provides dogs with an opportunity to use their most highly developed sense to sniff out hidden treats.



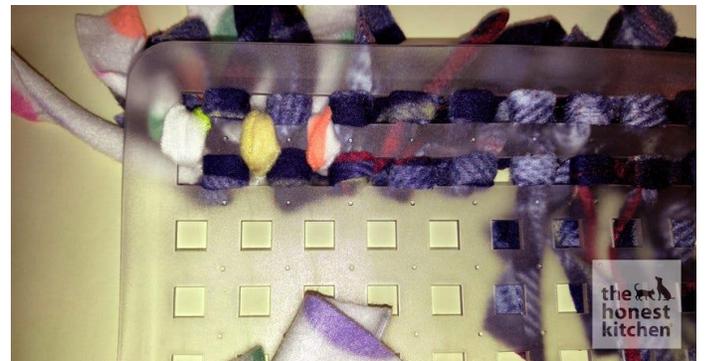
MATERIALS

Rubber sink mat. 12 by 15 inches works well for medium-sized dogs; change it up or down, depending on your dog's size.

Fleece material. Quantity depends on the size of the mat, but 1.5 yards should be plenty. Fleece comes in several thicknesses and weights; get the thinner cheap stuff. You'll be cutting it into short strips, and heavy fleece is hard to knot.

DIRECTIONS

1. Cut the fleece into strips about 1 to 1.5 inches wide by 6 to 7 inches long. Precision isn't necessary—a variety of strip widths and lengths enhance the fun. (The mat I made required 262 strips.)
2. Starting at the edge of the mat, take a strip of fleece and push one end through the first hole of the first row and the other through the second. Flip the mat over and tie the strip once (no need to double knot it).
3. Take a second strip and push one end through the second hole alongside the strip already there, then push the other end through the third hole. Again, turn over the mat and knot the strip. Continue until you finish one length of the rubber mat. Repeat on the second row of holes.
4. When you have two rows done, take a strip of fleece and push one end through the first hole in the first row, then push the other end through the first hole in the second row. Turn the mat over and single-knot the fleece. This strip is at right angles to the first one. Continue between the first and second rows until completed. Repeat this process on subsequent rows until all holes in the mat have been filled in.
5. When done, check the bottom of the mat to make sure there are no empty holes or missed cross strips. If you find some, fill them in and then turn the mat over, loose strip side up, and fluff the strips.



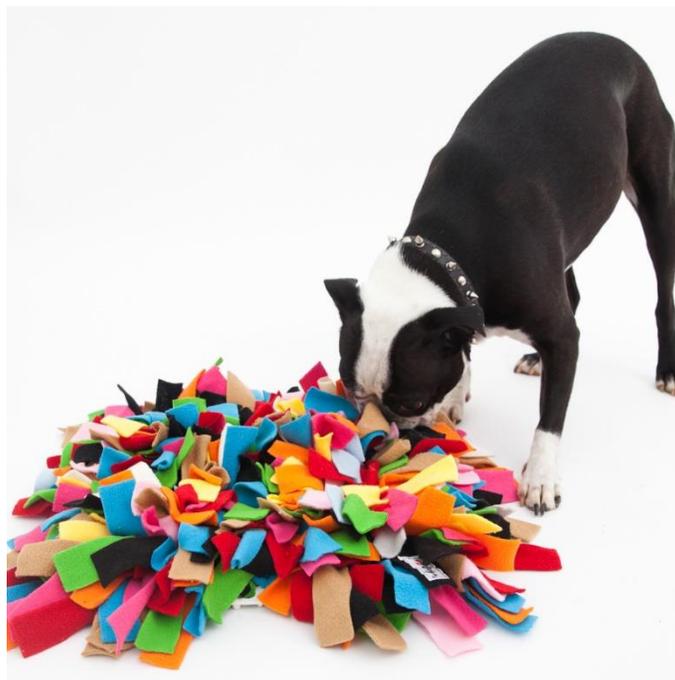


Teach Your Dog To Use The Mat

When I introduced the snuffle mat to my 13-week old puppy, Hero, I put it on the floor and let him watch me drop some treats on top of the strips. Then I told him to “find it.” After he found the treats, I had him sit/stay while I loaded the mat with more treats; this time, I hid some in between strips. For Bones, a four-year-old who has played many scenting games, I pushed the treats down in between strips so he had to actually hunt for them.

Most of the time I’ll play this twice with each dog and then call it quits. As with any toy or game, it’s best not to play until the dog has had too many treats or is bored. I also vary the treats I use to keep their interest high. Monitor Your Dog!

This toy should only be used when you can spend time with your dog and supervise his play. The fleece strips will soon begin to smell like treats, and if left alone with the mat, many dogs will chew the strips. Swallowed fleece can cause serious problems, which can potentially require surgery to fix.



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