

Training

Hunting In Range

By George Hickox

At the top of my most frequently asked questions list is: "How can I get my dog to hunt in range?" A close second comes from aspiring puppy owners: "How big do your dogs run?"

Here I'll impart some "tricks of the trade" for getting your dog to hunt for you rather than you having to hunt for it. I'll also explore a few myths regarding big-running dogs.

In my training schools, workshops and previous columns I have stressed the importance of genetics. Genetics plus training and nutrition equal a bragging-rights shooting dog. I encourage everyone to buy a dog with the best genetics they can find (or afford). For me, one indication of good genetics is an untrained dog that hunts with wild abandon, running with an almost maniacal purpose of finding birds. It's easier to reel in a dog than cast it out, and a dog that doesn't venture too far may actually lack hunting desire and drive.

For the walking hunter, I also advise looking for certain characteristics in a pup's family tree. Just as a shotgun should fit the individual, so should a dog's genes complement the hunter's objective. Look for a puppy from parents that are biddable and demonstrate a strong desire to please. I advocate buying a pup from a line with strong field-trial credentials but from the type of field trial compatible with your style of hunting. Accordingly, I would advise walking gunners to stay away from a pointing dog with a blue-ribbon background in endurance or free-for-all trialing. These dogs are

no doubt great animals but may have more independence and game seeking desire than you want to try harnessing. I've had tremendous success with pups from the shooting-dog trial circuit as well as from the grouse and woodcock wildbird field trial game. A pup from shooting-dog or grouse/woodcock trial stock will normally have the genes to be a good hunting companion.

Of course, keep in mind that there is no such thing as a self-trained dog that will meet the high standards of a gentleman's shooting dog. You must add the proper dash of training spices to the stock. The English springer spaniel trial circuit is an effective proving ground for superior hunting genetics and trainability. In the springer game, in order to attain field champion status, a dog must hunt in gun range, prove to be a superior marker of downed game, be steady to flush and retrieve to hand.

Choosing one of the retrieving breeds from field trial or hunt test ancestry (North American Hunting Retriever Association) will also reduce your chances of acquiring a dud. If versatile dogs are your passion, you would do well to buy a pup from parents that have earned their titles.

Once you have the pup, be sure to spend a lot of time with it, particularly during the first few months. Get to know the youngster and let it get to know and trust you. Without this one-on-one time, your pup may become independent, caring not where you are once you get afield. If you prefer a close-working dog, don't turn the pup loose for solo adventures, as aggressive dogs allowed to run free often become too bold and feel they no longer need their masters.

Assuming you start with good genetics, range is mostly a product of training or lack thereof. In the

beginning, when you are developing the hunting instinct and introducing the pup to birds, letting the dog find lots of birds in a small area will produce a close-worker. I like to start pups, no matter what breed, on good-flying pen-raised quail. If I'm trying to develop a closer-working gundog, I'll release a bunch of quail from the recall pen in a small hedgerow, apple orchard or grass patch about half the size of a football field. The pup will find lots of birds and continue hunting the relatively confined area because it's enjoying suc-



cess. When a young dog does not find birds it starts questing farther and farther out. If your objective is to create a big-running dog, plant fewer birds at greater distances. The young dog will soon learn it has to strike out if it's going to find anything.

When you take your pup for walks in the woods, expose the adolescent to new areas. And don't constantly talk to the pup if you prefer a close worker. Handlers who engage in non-stop encouragement ("Hunt 'em up, find the bird, c'mon boy, come around, over here, where's the bird?") may do so with the intent of keeping the dog close-however, the litany actually enables the dog to range farther out, always knowing the whereabouts of the handler and thus not feeling it necessary to check back. When you do say something, it should have meaning and the dog will respond better.

A word of caution: You may have heard the advice to occasionally hide on your youngster in the woods. The theory is that because the puppy is not yet secure, it will stay closer to you once it becomes afraid of being alone. Well, it probably will. However, this ploy will not build hunting desire, confidence or trust-rather timidity.

A good alternative is to carry a bird in your coat or game bag. When the pup gets too far, toss the bird out in front of you without the dog seeing it. When the pup returns

it will find the bird. After a few repetitions of this game, the pup will start catching on that birds are found closer to you. This positive training technique encourages the dog to check back without undermining confidence or setting up a training "fight."

Effective patterning and use of the wind, will result in more bird finds as well as more desirable range. If you live in an area ribboned with tote roads, plant birds alternately right and left every 20 yards-about 10 or 15 yards into the woods on

each side. Then run the pup up the road, into the wind. Encourage the young dog to get into the cover to find each pot of gold. You may have to walk into the cover with the pup on the first few outings, but eventually the dog will learn that by running left and right instead of straight out and back it will find birds. This "windshield-wiper" pattern will result in few holes where a bird might escape detection.

A dog hunting out of range is often out of control. If it is a pointing dog, quite often it will not hold point reliably. If it is a flushing or retrieving dog, odds are it is not steady to flush or shot. If your dog is out of control in the yard, it's unrealistic to think it will be in control in the field. Make control a lifestyle for your dog. Demand the pup waits before you give the release command for it to come out of the kennel. Make the dog whoa, hup or sit before eating dinner. Walk the dog at heel and stop it before releasing it at home and in the field. Often a remedial yard-training session-or five-will do wonders to establish control.

The proper training of a bragging-rights shooting dog begins with good genetics and includes plenty of time and effort. But it will all be worth it when you're holding that first hard-earned bird in one hand and petting your dog with the other.



Medical

Holiday Hazards for Pets

Texas A&M University Newswire

Holidays can be a wonderful time spent with loved ones and being grateful for everything we have received over the past year. However, there are some things to be aware of when holidays are in session. Our pets can become vulnerable to some holiday risks and it is important to be knowledgeable and cautious about those risks so they can be avoided.

The smells of food fill the air and even though it might be tempting to give your pet a treat please remember that there are a lot of pet specific treats that are not harmful to your pet, but human treats can often be harmful for your pet.

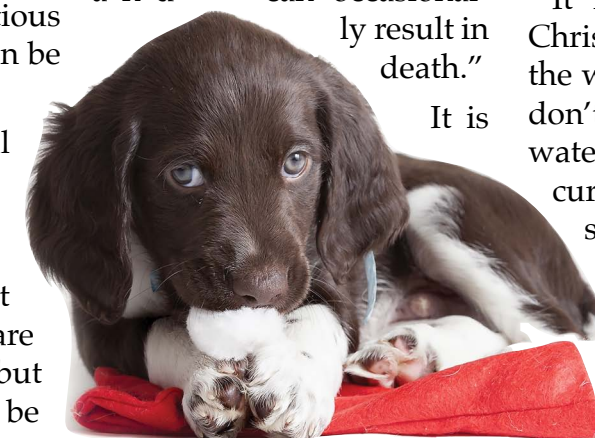
"Chocolate is by far the most commonly ingested dangerous food around the holidays," explains Dr. James Barr, clinical assistant professor in emergency and critical care at the Texas A&M College of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences (CVM). "Chocolate and coconuts contain theobromine, a chemical highly toxic to dogs. Ingestion in small amounts can cause vomiting and diarrhea, but large amounts can cause seizures and heart arrhythmias,

disorder of heart rate beating too fast or too slow."

Barr says that alcohol toxicity is another frequent issue for pets around the holiday season. Affected animals can experience seizures, dangerous drops in blood sugar, blood pressure, and body temperature as well as respiratory failure.

"One should avoid foods containing grapes and raisins as they have been reported to cause kidney failure in dogs," notes Barr. "Many sugarless gums and candies contain xylitol, which has a strange affect on dogs causing a mas-

sive insulin secretion and a dangerous, sometimes fatal, drop in blood sugar. One should also avoid fatty foods because this can cause severe inflammation of the pancreas known as pancreatitis, which can lead to abdominal pain, vomiting, and an occasional death."



also important to be careful when exposing plants to your pet. Some plants can be toxic to your pet, so make sure that all plants are out of their reach.

"Poinsettias have classically been thought of as toxic, but if ingested they only cause mild problems such as vomiting or diarrhea," explains Barr. "The same is true for holly berries or mistletoe, although they are slightly more dangerous

if large quantities are ingested. More concerning plants are any flower in the Lilly family because they can cause severe kidney failure in cats."

Holidays would not be the same without decorations. So keep your pet in mind when choosing decorations, especially your Christmas tree.

"Both real and artificial trees pose hazards for pets," says Barr. "The preservative for the water in the Christmas tree can contain ingredients such as bleach and vinegar which are caustic and can cause some gastrointestinal irritations. It is very important to keep pets away from drinking tree water."

It may be best to keep a Christmas tree in a stand where the water can be covered so pets don't have the option to drink the water. Also, it is important to secure the tree with a fishing line

string to a hook on the ceiling or wall to avoid it from falling over. Tree lights should not be plugged in when they are not being used so that your pet does not get tangled up in them. Pick up all tinsel, ribbon, ornaments, and hooks off of the floor so a pet does not mistake them for chew toys. Decorate the bottom of the Christmas tree with wood or plastic ornaments that won't break in case a pet likes to get close to the tree. Keep all of the gifts that contain human food off the floor so pets are not tempted by the smells. Burn candles in places that are inaccessible to your pets. Barr points out that liquid potpourri can cause chemical burns to the mouth and esophagus which can

be very painful and dangerous for any pet if ingested. Lastly, please avoid giving presents without consulting the receiver of the gift first. Animal shelters see an increase of donations directly after the holidays from short lived pet owners.

"While pets as presents may make for a popular parent, it is a well-known fact that shelter populations increase after the holidays as there are a lot of those pets that are surrendered because a family is unprepared for them," explains Barr. "If you are considering a pet as a gift, use the opportunity to visit a shelter and adopt a deserving pet from there. It can be a wonderful opportunity where the giver and the receiver will gain a lot more from the experience."

If you believe that your pet has ingested a toxic substance, please call: Pet Poison Helpline at 1-800-213-6680 or the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center at 1-888-426-4435. As always, the Texas A&M University Small and Large Animal Hospitals are always open for animal emergencies 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

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