

## GEORGIA DOG GYM CLASS SCHEDULE

Next Basic Training Class begins on Tuesday February 22, 2011 at 7pm

Next Puppy Kindergarten Class starts on Wednesday February 23 at 7pm (puppies up to 20 weeks of age are eligible)

Beginner Agility Classes have openings! We have two classes that meet on Thursdays (At 4:30pm and at 6:30pm). The cost is \$75 per six weeks and you may join at any time. Basic Obedience training is required in order to join the class.

Our Wednesday 6:30pm Advanced Sequencing Agility Class is now full. If you would like to join the class, we can put your name on the waiting list and let you know when a spot becomes available.

Rally Drop In Class is Ongoing on Fridays at 7pm. Drop in with your dog any time you like to learn more about Rally and play Rally with Us. It is only \$10 per dog/handler team.

## Beating the Winter Weather Blues

Winter has to be one of my least favorite seasons. Each year I bear down and start dreading what is to come as soon as I see the leaves start to turn. Winter is the biggest challenge for me in keeping my dogs happy, well conditioned, and mentally stimulated. When the temperatures dip below 40 degrees, the idea of going outside to play and train with my dogs really lacks the kind of appeal that curling up under a blanket on the couch offers me. I hear the same from my clients and my dog loving friends.



How can you resist *playing* outside in the snow with them when they make these faces?

Wintertime is hard on our dogs as well. While we pass on walks outdoors with them on cold days, they often become bored, anxious, or even depressed over their change in routine. While they get less exercise, we generally don't cut back on their feeding so they gain weight and often become obese during the winter. Indoor dogs can have a difficult time with itching and dandruff

when the heat indoors dries out their skin. Boredom and lack of exercise can also cause our dogs to get into mischief at home. Stealing shoes, chewing furniture, increased inappropriate barking, and even lapsing on housetraining are some of the behavior problems we deal with during winter when we just don't have the will to battle the cold to go out and spend time with our dogs.

While I train for a living year round, I have to get out in the weather to train nearly every single day. I have found several useful tips and tricks to survive the winter cold with dogs.

1. Collect a few essential winter wear items. First on the list are insulated overalls. They are certainly not a "fashion forward" type of outerwear, but my dogs have never been impressed by my exterior trappings. Wind proof coats are my latest winter wear discovery. I ordered 4 of them from Duluth Trading Company. Minnesotans know how to beat the cold, I guarantee! My favorite is my fire hose coat. Absolutely NO WIND passes through these coats. Also you need ear warmers, a hat, and gloves. Disposable hand warmers stashed in my pockets are also a DREAM when I am out in below freezing weather. A good pair of Gore-tex hiking boots will keep feet dry, and dry feet stay warm. I want to dress warm enough to stay outdoors comfortably for at least 45 minutes at a stretch. I have done a lot of wintertime people watching around town, and what I find so odd, is that almost no one puts on enough clothes here to stay warm outside. They may have enough on to dash from the car to inside the store without suffering hypothermia on the short walk, but, c'mon, flip flops at 28 degrees??? I wonder if Georgians think that if they dress like it's July outside, that the temperature gods will cooperate and dial the heat up for them. Or maybe it's a denial thing..... I just cannot ignore shivering, uncontrollable teeth chattering, and numb fingers and toes. So, invest in some clothes suitable for the weather.



2. Find toys suitable for winter weather play. If your dog fetches the tennis ball, winter dog ball play is miserable once the ball gets slobbery and your gloves and hands are wet and cold. Do not pick the ball up with your hands! The Kong Rocket is the best throwing stick used for balls that I have found yet. The stick picks up the ball and you launch the ball with the stick. The Rocket launches the ball to great distances with little effort and is also adjustable to fit many sizes and types of balls. Your hands stay warm and dry the whole time. I throw uphill for greater challenge and exercise for my dogs. For dogs who like to chase the ball but do not bring it back, the Rocket is great when you add 6 to 10 tennis balls to the yard where you can stroll around tossing balls for your dog to chase as

you find them. I also play with another toy launcher called the Zinger. It throws a donut shaped rubber toy that bounces and rolls.

If your dogs will chase toys that you kick around the yard, they can be easily entertained with some tough and durable toys like the Jolly Ball or the Jolly Egg. Toy kicking in winter is great because your hands can stay warm in your pockets while you play. My puppies are obsessed with their Jolly Egg and will play outside for a long time with the Jolly Egg by themselves and they have been completely unable to destroy it.

Frisbees must be selected for cold weather play. Most Frisbees become brittle in the cold and will easily crack and break. The sharp edges can cut your dog's mouth and tongue and cause them not to want to play with the frisbee. In winter, I play with the Euroblend frisbee, or the Hero Flex frisbee which are designed for cold weather play and will not crack or break.

I also offer more interactive toys indoors in the winter. The Kong Wobbler is my latest favorite. It can be easily loaded with kibble and has a "Weeble-Wobble" action as the dog bats it around to get the kibble out of it. This toy is easily washable and very durable. I stuff Kong toys with treats and kibble so that my dogs have a varied and interesting chew toy on very cold days. I also provide more knuckle bones and bully sticks in the winter on those days when we cannot get outdoors as much.

3. Think of ways to use your dog's training skills indoors. Your dog's training does not have to backslide in the winter just because it's too cold to go outside and train. There is plenty of room in the house to review basic commands and keep them fresh. I can practice heel with my dog up and down the hallway, around the couch, and through the kitchen. Indoors is a terrific place to work on off leash heeling. I can practice sit stay and down-stay just about anywhere in the house. If my dog will stay while I go several rooms away, I can also practice having him come to me in the house. Several tricks can be taught indoors with very little room: shake a paw, sit pretty, roll over, spin, back up, and crawl are all simple tricks that keep your dog's mind working while you stay warm inside.



Rook and Seven need to run every day, no matter what the weather forecast says.

4. Keep an eye on your dog's physical condition. If you are noticing that your dog is gaining weight, do not be afraid to cut his daily kibble ration. You can add bulk to the diet with carrots, green beans, or pumpkin, without adding unnecessary calories. Second

to inappropriately large food portions, corn is often a major culprit causing weight gain, behind that is sweeteners added to dog food. If your dog's food contains corn, you should switch to a food that is corn-free. Dry skin, itching, and dandruff due to indoor heating can be soothed and remedied with less frequent bathing, more regular brushing, changing shampoos to an oatmeal shampoo, and adding either flax oil or fish oil to the diet.

Humidifiers also help animals cope with dry home conditions during the winter.

5. Come Play with Us at the Georgia Dog Gym! If you can't get out in the cold to play with your dog, we offer doggie daycare every weekday. Friendly dogs get to play in groups with other dogs. Our staff gets outdoors and plays with dogs individually when they cannot play with other dogs. Our clients tell us that after a day of doggie daycare, that their dogs come home happy and exhausted. If you want to work on training, we rent out our heated indoor training room where you can train and play in a large space without being cold. We also offer training class, a rally drop in class, and agility class where you can beat the cold, get some training in, and visit with other folks who love spending time with their dogs. Winter can also be a great time to send your dog off to me for boarding training. Then \*I\* can get outdoors with them in all of my great cold weather gear, get them tuned up and training great, while you stay toasty warm indoors, knowing that your dog is getting plenty of exercise, mental stimulation, and one-on-one time.

The best cure for the Winter Blues is put on all your winter gear and get out there with your dogs! Moving around will make you feel better and watching the joyful play and romping of your furry friends is bound to lift your spirits! We have a few more months to go before we see warmer weather, but I hope that these tips and tricks will help to carry you through until we get there.



Playtime Brings the Smiles We Love!