



NOSE IT ALL

Rover is a “nose it all.” Actually, most dogs are. We learn about the world through our eyes; dogs, however, use their noses. According to the scientists who study such things, a dog's ability to discern scents is up to a million times more sensitive than ours. They can pick up a scent even when only a few molecules remain. I can't even imagine what the world must smell like to Rover.

I watched Rover as he lay outside with his head raised, facing into the breeze. The tip of his nose was twitching, and he moved his head slightly back and forth “reading” the smells on the wind. Then he got up and looked in that direction, his nose really working the breeze. His body language indicted interest. A minute later, a woman and her dog walked around the corner. Did Rover know they were coming? I would say yes.

After they went by, we went out to the sidewalk and Rover's head went down to the pavement. He “traced” their path backwards around the corner. He stopped a few places, engrossed in sniffing. I didn't stop him because it was interesting just to watch.

Rover sniffed back and forth and then followed a scent onto the grass. I have no idea if it was the same scent, but Rover was certainly intrigued. He went back and forth across the lawn a couple of times, all the while his nose an inch or less from the ground. Once or twice he raised his head, looked around and then went right back to sniffing.

There was one clump of grass that was particularly interesting. Rover stood over it for almost a minute “examining” each blade, his nose twitching and wiggling as he explored the scent. I got down on the ground and sniffed it, too, but it just smelled like grass to me. I sniffed another area just a little bit away and it smelled exactly the same to me, but not to Rover. He was definitely captivated by that one clump of grass.

If you want to play a really interesting nose games with your Rover, play hide and seek with a person, toy or treat. You have to first teach Rover what “find” means. We did this by telling Rover to “stay,” letting him smell a treat, and then putting the treat just around the corner. We “released” him and said, “Find the treat.” When he found it, we made a big deal of “Good find!” After a few times, he knew what “find” meant.

Once he knew what find meant, we made it a little harder each time, and now we hide stuff in places he really has to work to find. We've even put a treat inside a ripped stuffed animal, inside a box, under a table in a dark room. It took Rover a while, but he found it.

It's really fascinating to watch Rover search for the item. He'll do a quick nose search of the room, and then work his way around sniffing the air, poking his nose under things until he “catches” the scent. Once that happens, he usually finds it pretty quickly.

We also play “find the cookie” out in the yard, and Rover's getting pretty quick. Although sometimes I have to encourage him because we have a fairly big yard, he really loves the game. Plus, he gets to eat the reward at the end.

This amazing ability to “nose it all” is why dogs can find people, drugs and bombs, can detect insects and the source of fires. Some dogs can follow scents that are days old.

This may be a part of the reason it can take some dogs—especially scent hounds like beagles—longer to learn how to walk nicely on leash: the scents can and will distract them. We had to teach Rover to walk with his head up instead of with his nose to the ground. At times, we let Rover sniff, but we decide when and where, not him.

It's important to let dogs do dogs things, but it's also important to teach them how to fit into our world. When you do both, the results are twice as rewarding.

As Rover would say, Smell ya later.

Happy Dogs = Happy Families.

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Training Dogs The Aussie Way!

