

Small Yard Game Cards

Games that work in the yard you've actually got.

01

Lawn scatter hunt

TURN THE YARD INTO A SEARCH AREA

Toss a handful of kibble into longer grass and walk away. The cheapest, most repeatable enrichment there is, and it converts a meal into fifteen minutes of nose-down foraging. If your grass is short, scatter into a pile of fallen leaves instead.

02

Scent pot grid

TURN THE YARD INTO A SEARCH AREA

Six to ten upturned plant pots or boxes in a loose grid, one or two baited. Your dog works the grid to find them. Difficulty scales beautifully: move the pots between rounds, or bait them and wait five minutes before releasing your dog so the scent has time to settle.

03

Perimeter scent trail

TURN THE YARD INTO A SEARCH AREA

Drag a scented sock around the fence line in a spiral, finishing at a hidden reward in the middle. You get thirty metres of tracking out of a garden you could cross in four steps.

04

Find the person

TURN THE YARD INTO A SEARCH AREA

Hide behind the shed, the bins, a bush, the car. Release your dog to find you. Social, scent-based and genuinely engaging even in a tiny space – and it quietly builds recall.

05

Log and brush foraging pile

TURN THE YARD INTO A SEARCH AREA

A heap of safe logs, branches and leaves with food hidden through it. This adds vertical and textural complexity to a flat yard, which is the thing small gardens most lack.

Watch: Avoid treated timber and anything toxic – yew and oleander in particular.

06

Flirt pole, short-arc version

CHASE GAMES WITH NO RUN-UP

Tight figure-of-eight sweeps close to your own feet rather than long arcs. You get the full chase-and-catch sequence inside a three-metre circle. Because the turns are tighter, keep sessions to sixty or ninety seconds with real breaks, and keep the lure on the ground – never overhead.

...8 more.

07

Treibball

CHASE GAMES WITH NO RUN-UP

Teaching your dog to nose-push a large exercise ball toward a goal. One of very few genuinely tiring games that needs no run-up at all, and it's as much training as exercise. Herding breeds take to it immediately.

08

Diagonal restrained recalls

CHASE GAMES WITH NO RUN-UP

Use the longest line the yard allows, corner to corner. One person holds, the other calls. Makes real speed out of a small footprint – just make sure there's braking room and they aren't sprinting at a fence.

09

Jolly ball soccer

CHASE GAMES WITH NO RUN-UP

An oversized ball with a handle that your dog can bat, chase and carry without you throwing anything. Self-play, no skill required, and no throw rate for you to keep up with.

10

Dig pit

THINGS WORTH BUILDING ONCE

A child's paddling pool or a defined corner filled with sand, with toys buried in it. Digging is strongly self-reinforcing and burns real energy. In a small yard this is the difference between a channelled instinct and a cratered lawn – give them somewhere it's allowed and most dogs stop digging elsewhere.

11

Hanging bottle spinner

THINGS WORTH BUILDING ONCE

A plastic bottle on a rod or rope strung between two posts, holes drilled in it, kibble inside. They spin it to release food. Twenty minutes to build, then it works without you. Remove the cap and the ring, and replace the bottle once it's chewed through.

12

Low cavaletti loop

THINGS WORTH BUILDING ONCE

Four to six broom handles laid flat or on very low blocks, spaced to your dog's stride, walked as a circuit. This is a genuine physiotherapy exercise – deliberate, low-impact work on limb placement and core strength.

Watch: Keep the poles at or below wrist height and walk them, don't trot or jump.

...2 more.

13

Paddling pool bobbing

WATER AND HOT WEATHER

A few inches of water, floating toys and treats to retrieve by mouth. Cooling, low-impact, novel, and it takes up almost no room.

14

Frozen food block

WATER AND HOT WEATHER

Kibble, a little broth and a couple of toys frozen in an ice-cream tub, turned out onto the grass. Long-duration licking and working at it. Perfect for a hot afternoon, and it's the one game on this list that happens entirely without you.

your own

your own

your own

your own