

BY CHERIE
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Dealing with winter weather and a dog driven wild by boredom? Here's how to cope.

The dog days of summer, when you and your canine companion took long hikes and played Frisbee until sunset have faded into golden memories. Winter's diving temperatures, soaring snowdrifts, or depression-inducing downpours will force many of us inside where we would happily hibernate if it were possible — and if our dogs would let us.

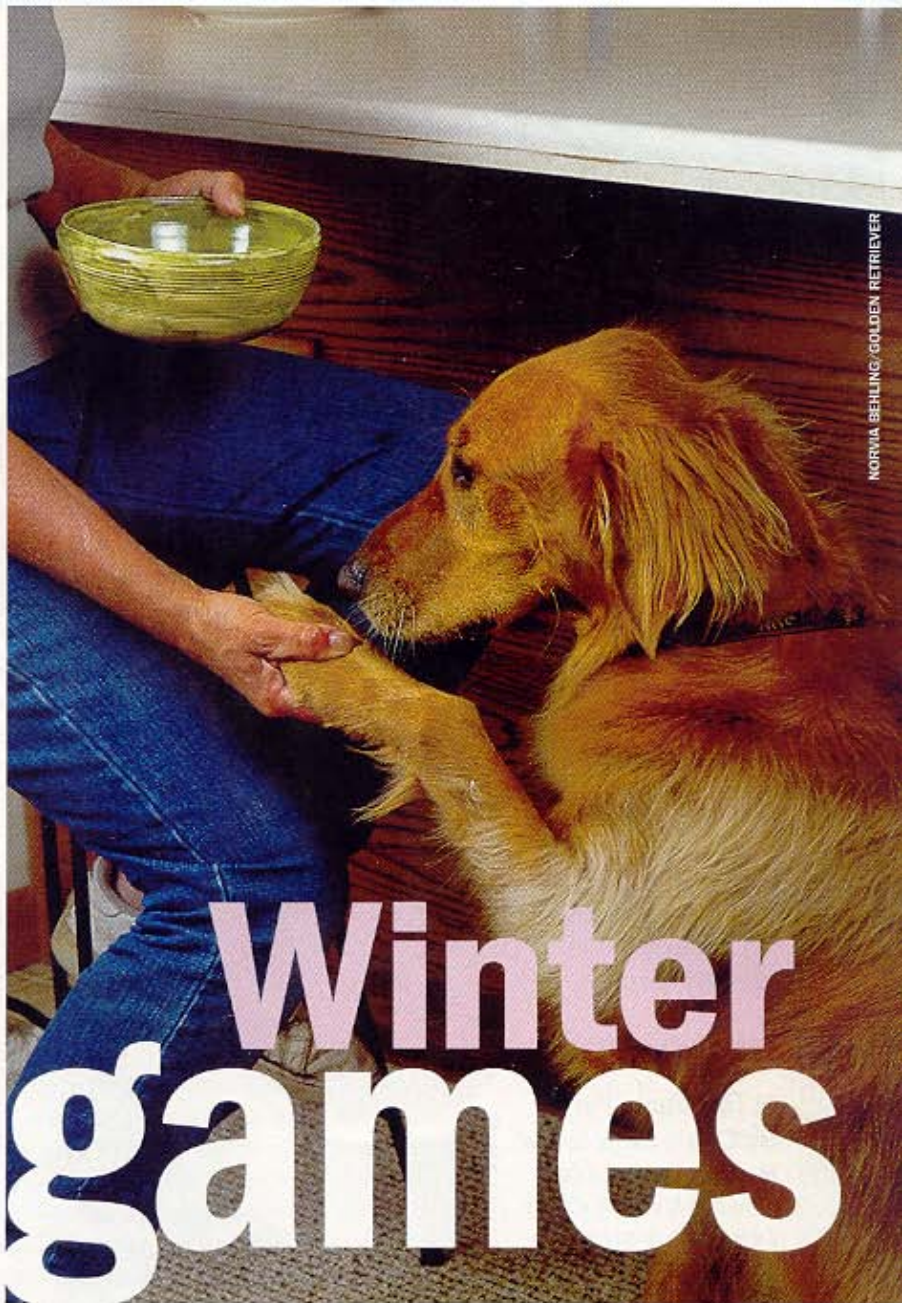
But canines can't hibernate either, and they're just as susceptible to cabin fever when stuck inside for days. Carol A. Byrnes, a certified pet dog trainer at Diamonds in the Ruff in Spokane, Wash., shares these tips for battling winter boredom.

Give your dog a job. Humans bred different dog breeds to perform various jobs, from nabbing vermin to herding livestock. Many modern-day companion dogs still need a job to let out that instinctive energy. Can't see fitting a flock of sheep into your house? No problem. Train your dog to assist with those chores you do every day, such as gently waking the kids or gathering toys and dropping them in a box.

"If you have a dog that likes to pick up and carry things, she needs an outlet for that behavior," says Byrnes, whose 1-year-old Rat Terrier Higgins delivers the dog dishes to her each night in exchange for a treat. "It's nothing I make him do — he initiates the game on his own as soon as the dishes are empty."

Variety is key. Although dogs enjoy predictable rituals, they don't like things to be mundane, Byrnes says. Her canine busboy loves it when she adds a new twist to his bowl-gathering game, like having him stack the dishes. Try teaching your dog some new tricks, and keep a variety of toys on hand, rotating them to maintain her interest. Treat-dispensing balls and other toys that require your dog to think can help occupy her when she's home alone or you're too busy to play. Tough chew bones and rope toys also combat boredom.

Exercise your canine's brain. Providing your dog with intense indoor physical exercise isn't easy, especially if she's a large breed or you live in a small space. Fortunately, mental games can tire a dog as much as a physical workout. A plus: Interactive problem-solving play will enhance your relationship. Hide-and-seek games require sniffing, thinking, and moving, so they work particularly well for



NORWIA BEHLING/GOLDEN RETRIEVER

Winter games

pooping out a pooch. Put your dog in a Sit-Stay in one room (or have someone hold her) while you or another person hides. Call her, and reward with praise or a treat when she finds you. Variations include having her sniff out treats or a toy.

Play with your pet. While toys are good indoor diversions, all the tennis balls in the world are no substitute for a live playmate. According to Byrnes, dogs crave social interaction; they want to be part of the family unit. So, on a dark, stormy winter's night, when you see your dog grab her favorite toy, join her in a fun, interactive game like fetch or hide and seek. You'll beat boredom, enhance your bond, and possibly save your belongings. "If you only get out of your chair when your dog has the TV remote or your shoe, those are the items she's going to target," Byrnes says.

Use these boredom-busters this winter, and you and your dog just might discover the cure to cabin fever, no hibernation required. **DF**

Beat winter boredom by teaching your dog new tricks.

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