

Find It! – The Ultimate Scent Game for Dogs

By Rob Wright, Dog Aggression Specialist

<http://dog-aggression-specialist.com>

A Dog's Life is Lived Through Their Nose

To understand your dog, you need to understand their nose. Dogs experience the world **primarily through scent** – far more than sight or sound. While we humans tend to rely on our eyes, dogs are built to sniff. Their **sense of smell is estimated to be between 10,000 and 100,000 times more sensitive than ours**.

They have up to **300 million scent receptors** in their noses (compared to our 5 million), and the part of their brain dedicated to analysing smells is around **40 times larger** than ours in proportion to brain size. They can detect a single drop of blood in an Olympic-sized swimming pool or follow a trail that's days old – even if it's been walked over by other people or animals.

Scent is how dogs read the world: who's been where, what they were feeling, how long ago they passed. It's how they explore, investigate, communicate, and feel safe. When we engage our dogs in sniff-based activities like 'Find It', we're not just playing – we're allowing them to be who they truly are.

'Find It' is a brilliant scent-based game that taps into your dog's natural sniffing instincts. It starts simply with visible treats and builds up to more complex challenges involving scent trails, impulse control, and marking a hidden find. It's suitable for dogs of all ages and abilities, and can even be developed for **real-life applications** – such as helping your dog find lost keys, mobile phones, other dogs, cats, or even children in a controlled setting.

What You'll Need

- **High-value treats:** Something smelly and irresistible – like bits of cooked chicken or smelly cheese.
- **Favourite toy** (optional): Ideally one with a strong scent or rubbed with a treat.
- **Quiet space:** Start indoors, then move outdoors to a safe, enclosed area.
- **Commands:** Useful ones include *sit*, *down*, *stay*, and a release cue like *okay*.
- **Verbal marker or clicker:** E.g., "yes!" to mark success.
- **Your enthusiasm:** Keep it fun, upbeat, and positive!

Step-by-Step Instructions

Step 1: Introduce the Cue – “Find It!”

Goal: Build association between the cue and a reward.

- Let your dog sniff a treat or toy, then place it visibly on the floor.
- Say “*Find it!*” and point.
- When they touch/eat it, mark with “*yes!*” and praise.
- Repeat 10–15 times over 2–3 days.

Tip: Use a toy rubbed with treat to enhance scent if needed.

Step 2: Add Sit and Wait

Goal: Build impulse control.

- Ask your dog to sit and wait.
- Place the treat 1–1.5m away, still visible.
- Return, pause briefly, say “*Find it!*” and release.
- Praise once found.

Tip: If they break the wait, calmly reset and reduce the delay.

Step 3: Partially Hide the Item

Goal: Encourage sniffing and low-level search behaviour.

- While your dog waits, place the treat partially hidden (e.g., behind a chair leg or under a cushion).
- Use the cue and release them.
- Mark and reward once found.

Repeat: 8–10 times over 3–4 days.

Step 4: Hide the Item While Out of Sight

Goal: Encourage independent searching.

- Place your dog in another room or use a solid “stay”.
- Hide 2–3 items around the room.
- Let them sniff a “sample” item before releasing with “*Find it!*”
- Mark and praise each find.

Repeat: 5–8 times for 4–5 days, gradually increasing difficulty.

Step 5: Down-Stay & Scent Trails Indoors

Goal: Improve stay duration and scent tracking.

- Ask for a down-stay.
- Create a scent trail by dragging the item before hiding it.
- Release with the cue.
- Mark the find when they touch it with nose or paw.

Build up: Hide more cleverly, add towels, boxes, or closed spaces.

Step 6: Take It Outside (Easy Hides)

Goal: Transition to new environments.

- In a quiet, fenced garden, use a down-stay.
- Hide a treat or toy 1.5–3m away (in view).
- Release, cue, mark, and praise.

Keep it short & successful – outdoors can be full of distractions.

Step 7: Outdoor Hidden Object Tracking

Goal: Develop tracking skills with mild challenge.

- Drag the toy or treat along the ground to create a scent trail (3–5m).
- Hide the item (e.g., under a bush, behind a rock).
- Let them sniff a sample, then release.

Repeat: 4–6 searches per session over a week.

Step 8: Advanced Outdoor Challenge

Goal: Down-stay, scent trail, and marking the find.

- Use a longer down-stay (30–60 seconds).
- Drag and hide the item (up to 15m away) in a tricky spot (e.g., shallow soil, tall grass).
- Let them sniff a cloth or similar before releasing.
- Mark the *find* when they nose, paw, or pick up the object.

Keep progressing: Introduce more distractions, different surfaces, or larger areas.

Real-Life Applications

With consistent practice, your dog can be trained to:

- **Find lost dogs or cats** by scent article (blanket, collar).

- **Search for a child** in a game of hide and seek – builds family connection and fun.
- **Locate missing items** like your keys, phone, wallet, or even another dog's toy.
- **Help on hikes or camping** – track back to base, another person, or a vehicle.
- **Support in emergencies** – scent games sharpen focus and responsiveness in high-stress environments.

Progressing and Troubleshooting

- **Only progress when 80–90% successful** at each level.
- **If stuck**, reduce difficulty, increase scent, or make the find more obvious.
- **Use high value reinforcers** – treats, toys, praise, whatever your dog loves.
- **If they lose the trail**, don't point. Encourage them calmly to keep sniffing.
- **Always finish on a win** – hide one easy one at the end to boost confidence.

Benefits

- **Mental enrichment:** 15 minutes of scent work = up to 1 hour's walk!
- **Physical exercise:** Even in small spaces.
- **Builds confidence:** Especially for shy or anxious dogs.
- **Strengthens bond:** Shared fun creates trust and reliability.
- **Practical value:** With extra training, it can become a real-world skill.

Safety Tips

- Never use objects that could be swallowed or dangerous to chew.
- Avoid sharp plants, toxic materials, or unsecured spaces outdoors.
- Monitor the environment and your dog's excitement levels – end before they become overwhelmed.
- Be mindful of health – avoid intense searching for dogs with pain or physical limitations.

Have a Great Time!

Let us know how you and your dog get on – and share your favourite hiding spots!

Warm wishes,

Rob Wright

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