

The following information has been adapted from Dr. Brenda Griffin's [Playing Games with Shelter Dogs](#)

It is always a good idea for dogs to learn how to take treats gently from your hand. They should learn how to "LEAVE IT" and not grab it from your hand until it is offered to them. You can teach this skill readily to any dog that wants the food you are holding. Here are a few simple methods for doing that – If you are clever, these too can be fun games for dogs learning this important skill!

**Leave it – (method 1)**

1. Hold a tasty treat in your fist.
2. Hold your fist out to the dog with the treat inside.
3. The dog will likely investigate your fist – sniff, paw, lick...try to nibble...
4. Wait quietly until he stops and moves his nose away from your fist: the instant he does this, say "YES" or click, and open your hand and let him eat the treat from your flat palm.
5. Remember to add the cue when the dog is reliably refraining from getting the treat – you can say "LEAVE IT".
6. When he is doing well, raise the bar (make the game a little harder) – Try offering him the treat in an open hand. The goal is for him not to take it until you give him permission to do so—Be prepared to close your fist around the treat if he tries!
7. When he is doing well, try doing this in different situations – treat on a chair, treat on the ground, etc.
8. Remember to add the cue when the dog is reliably refraining from getting the treat – you can say "LEAVE IT". You should also use a cue to let him know when he has permission to take the treat – "TREAT".

**LEAVE IT (method 2)**

1. Hold a dry biscuit in one fist and a higher value treat (and your clicker if you are using one) behind your back.
2. Hold your fist out to the dog with the biscuit inside.
3. The dog will likely investigate your fist – sniff, paw, lick...
4. Wait quietly until he stops and moves his nose away from your fist: the instant he does this, say "YES" or click + feed him the high value treat from behind your back.
5. Remember to add the cue when the dog is reliably refraining from getting the biscuit –you can say "LEAVE IT".
6. When he is doing well, raise the bar (make the game a little harder) – Try offering him the biscuit in an open hand. The goal is for him not to take it so be prepared to close your fist around the treat if he tries! If he successfully refrains from trying to get the biscuit, say "YES" or click + feed him the high value treat from behind your back.
7. When he is doing well, try doing this in different situations – biscuit on a chair, biscuit

on the ground, etc.

### **LEAVE IT (method 3)**

\*Note: This method is not recommended for hand shy or fearful dogs.

1. Hold a tasty treat in your hand.
2. Position your hand palm up with the treat between your thumb and forefinger, and the rest of your fingers closed gently over your palm. Offer the treat to the dog and let him take it. Repeat this a few times in a row until he has happily taken several treats from your hand.
3. Next, hold a treat between your thumb and forefinger, but change the position of your hand such that your palm is facing down with your other fingers closed gently over it. When the dog approaches to take the treat, encourage him to move away by straightening your fingers out and waving them or gently pushing his face to block his advances. The amount of insistence you use will depend on the dog, but NEVER hit the dog and be very careful not to frighten the dog with your hand.
4. Wait quietly until he stops and moves his nose away from your hand: the instant he does this, say "YES" or click, and return your hand to the original position (palm up) and let him have the treat.
5. The position of your hand becomes the dog's cue as to whether or not he may take the treat. This tends to slow down a dog that wants to snatch the treat right out of your hand because he learns that he must look to see what position your hand is in before he can approach and take the treat. For some dogs, this works very nicely!