



# Underdog

## Underdog Training & Behaviour Consulting

### Going Urban and how to keep man's best friend in the process.

The Australian backyard. Big enough to kick the football. Room for a barbeque and a game of cricket. Or so there used to be. As the average Australian backyard shrinks beyond recognition, families get used to less outside space. But have we forgotten someone in the process? Mans best friend, the dog, needs to adjust- as we have- to highly urbanised living.

With the majority of the Australian population living as close as possible to our state capitals and large towns, high density developments are becoming more common place. Gone are the days where the family dog could wander the quiet street, play with the children in the afternoon and trot home for dinner as the sun fell. And yet, Australia's dog population sits at over 4 million. Australians have more dogs than ever before and many of these dogs will be found in our inner city areas- contained to small backyards, courtyards balconies or apartments. It is naive to think that this change in the way that we live does not impact our dogs. While we know dogs can live happily in apartments and townhouses, urban dog owners can help their four legged friends to ensure their lives are as enriched as their backyard dwelling companions of yesteryear.

Dog selection is the first and likely to be the most critical step in ensuring an urban dog is a happy one. Many people mistakenly believe that smaller is always better and this simply isn't the case. Active dogs come in all shapes and sizes and some dogs are simply not suited to such highly urban living. There is a key additional question- does the potential owner of the urban dog also work full time, away from the home? Those who work longer hours should choose a breed noted to be independent rather than those requiring more constant companionship. Breeds suited to urban living depending on other key factors (grooming, companionship requirements etc) may include- Greyhounds, Whippets, Toy poodles, Havanese, Maltese, French Bulldogs, Tibetan Spaniels, Cavaliers, British Bulldogs, Bichon Frise, and Shar Peis. Where should you find your perfect urban dog? A Canine council registered breeder can assist your choice to go urban- predictable temperament, coat and size are key reasons for selecting a breeder with care.

So now, we have our urban dog. The occasional roll of toilet paper is strewn from end to end of the apartment, the neighbours make comment on your new dog (who they can hear like a jackhammer in their living room) and you just know the dog has had an accident somewhere- and yet- you can't quite find it! But is our urban dog happy? Urban dogs may miss out on some outside space, but provide the following and you can ensure your urban dog is truly happy to be one.

Sensory stimulation is key for any canine, in any environment. So how do we provide work for the dogs' senses, in an area unlikely to catch the summer breeze or have a view to the outside world? In a home with no outside space, dogs should be walked twice daily outside the home. Dogs living with a small outside space require one walk every day. These are minimum requirements for most urban dogs. Puppies without their vaccinations complete should be carried at least twice daily to see the outside world that they are about to join. Can't meet these requirements? Dog Day care and dog walking services are available in most areas to compensate for busier lifestyles- you don't have to do it alone! And while it may be true that the dogs you had when you were a kid didn't need day care or a dog walker- the dogs of yesteryear generally had more space and companionship than what we are capable of providing today. Times change- how we provide for man's best friend needs to change too.



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The outside exercise you provide should comprise of exciting and novel experiences- different streets, parks and distractions are a great opportunity to train and socialise the urban dog. Urban dogs should be permitted the opportunity to scent and smell for at least part of their outside time- dogs look with their nose first so to restrict scenting opportunities completely can be detrimental. Olfactory stimulation is not limited to walks- scent detection games can take place in the smallest possible inside space. Don't understand how the dogs' nose works and how to harness it? Find a dog trainer to help you or read the Underdog article- Scent work Secrets- harnessing the dogs most powerful sense\*\*.

Is your dog home alone? In between some long naps (it is a dogs life after all!) your urban dog will be looking for things to do. Given running around a large backyard is not an option, what can you do to provide for your dog and ensure you don't arrive home to a redecorated space or irate neighbour? The rotation of interactive toys is one of the best ways to reduce boredom and work your dogs' brain! Interactive toys are not the tennis ball that lies on the ground, waiting for someone to throw it. Interactive toys are games and puzzles that often dispense food as the dog plays- some dispense food regularly, others require the dog to work harder for the reward. Feeding your urban dogs' morning meal from a bowl? Stop!! Feeding a morning meal from a bowl instead of a food dispensing toy is a wasted opportunity. There is a wide range of interactive toys available- buy 3 and rotate them every 2-3 days. With the novelty value of the toys remaining high- your dog will feel like its Christmas- every few days! Don't want to give raw bones for the dog to chew on inside? Nylabones and smoked bones can be a great alternative.

Urban environments present unique distractions- high density housing also means high density humans and amenities. So what will your urban dog do when they see hundreds of people? The rush of trams and beeping of horns during peak hour? The Sunday morning pack of cyclists racing down the street? How will they respond to food on the foot path? Picnickers who share the multi use park with their spread of roast chicken and salad- right next to the off lead area you frequent? Train and socialise your dog- the better your dogs behaviour, the easier it will be to integrate them into your normal life. Take your puppy to puppy pre school. Take your adult dog to some practical dog training. The benefits? A confident, well adjusted, calm and well behaved dog in the face of daily urban challenges.

The well behaved dog is welcomed by many and included in a busy lifestyle- a walk to school to pick up the kids, an alfresco coffee, a stroll around an open air market. So where does that leave the poorly behaved dog? At home. Becoming more tightly wound- as the urban dog cannot run off steam in the same way that the dogs of yesterday could. The urban dog depends on its owner more than ever. To provide sensory stimulation, physical exercise, training, socialisation and environmental enrichment. The dog cannot fill their own treat ball. The dog cannot connect their lead for walkies or recall to the invisible person. The dog cannot fill time when you are absent with scent games- without your help. Mans best friend and an urban lifestyle can combine- they don't have to be at the expense of each other. But adaptable urban dogs are not born, they are created- by the humans who choose and love their urban lifestyle.

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