

Leave It

Goal.

For your dog to leave items alone when you give the cue, “Leave It.” We’ll start with low-value items, but eventually work up to anything, including a plate of food, trash, your cat, your favorite running shoes, or even your grandmother.

What you will need to get started.

A few small low-value treats paired against high-value treats. A flat-band leash attached to your dog.

Caution: Do not attempt this with a dog that guards food or toys. Have an experienced trainer extinguish that behavior before you attempt this.

Getting started.

Hold your high-value treats in one hand and your low low-value treats in the other. Place a low-value treat on the floor close to your dog as you say “Leave it.” When your dog moves for the treat on the floor, say, “Uh-uh,” and block her access to the treat with your body. We recommend using your body rather than the leash. Think of the leash as a safety net. This may be difficult at first, but make sure the dog does not get the treat.

It is also critical that you remove the block or release the leash so the dog has the opportunity to go after the treat on the floor. As she does, you say, “Uh-uh,” and block or restrain again. This will reinforce your dog’s understanding of the meaning of “Uh-uh.”

The instant your dog backs away or looks away from the treat on the low-value treat on the floor, say, “Good!” and offer a high-value treat.

Pick the food up off the floor and repeat this until your dog will look to you immediately when you say, “Leave it.”

Once you are successful with stationary treats, try rolling some across the floor. Movement will make the treats more enticing.

Keys to success.

Practice, practice, practice with low-value items before you ask your dog to leave something of even moderately high value. Don’t make the mistake of assuming that because Sophie will leave a piece of kibble when you say, “Leave it,” that she will leave a squirrel carcass. She won’t. Not yet, anyway.