

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG Pop quiz to start today's podcast. You're going to be training a dog to retrieve to you. You want them to learn how to become an awesome retriever right to hand. Now you have a choice of three items that you're going to start this training with. Would you use number one, a squeaky toy? Now it doesn't have to be this squeaky toy, but a size appropriate for your dog.

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Would you use a stuffable food toy? With that you could put food in there and then wrap it up super tight with the velcro so it's, you know, they can't get into it. Or would you use a rubber bone? You choose. If you are watching this, put in the comments what you would choose. Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And today is all about toys.

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If you're watching this on YouTube, go ahead and hit the like button for me right now, because I promise you, you're going to like what I've got for you. If you're not watching this and you're listening in your car, I've got lots of things that I'm going to describe them to you. But when you get a chance circle back and watch this on YouTube, you're going to love it. Because lots of great things to show you today, as well as tell you.

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So, I'm also going to be giving away my favorite training toy. The toy that I use most often when I'm training my own dogs. I'm going to talk about the retrieve items that I suggest you not use with your dog, three of which are very dangerous and potentially could cause death. Ah, that's right. I'm not exaggerating. It could cause serious injury, if not death, right. I'm going to circle back and what I promised from our last episode, I told you there's five toys that I started my dog training career with that didn't cost me one penny.

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So, a dog training is an expensive investment at times, but dog toys don't have to be that investment. I'm going to share with you how you can make or get your own toys. And there's nothing illegal or moral with what I'm going to tell with you.

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Back before I was a professional dog trainer, I actually didn't give any thought into why I picked a toy. It would just be like, "That's cute, Ooh." It was what appealed to me, I would buy that for my dog. Today I'm a little bit more systematic about it and that's what you will find experts in any avenue of life.

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They have become the best in the world at what they are because they systematize, they processize. Is that a word? Let's call it one. They create processes for everything that they have to do. And so, for me I have six categories that I will put all the toys into that I use. Now there will be some overlap, but there will be definite go-to toys that I will use in each one of these categories.



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And yes, I'm going to give you my answer to that question that I asked you at the top of the podcast. And there is a best answer for any dog, for every dog. If you choose the wrong toy in answer to that question, it will take you eons longer to train or retrieve. If in fact, you even are able to train that retrieve. I'll get to that more on that later.

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But let's dive right into what are my six categories. The first one is **engagement** and that is creating a relationship with a dog. So, in order to create a real, in any relationship, human, kid, friend, dynamic, there's an exchange of value. I value spending time with you. You I'm hoping, are valuing spending time on this podcast. You get great value because you are investing your time and time is something we can't get back. And so, with our dogs, when we are engaging with them, it's got to be something they value.

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Now the caveat to this, or the asterix to this, is we can create value with anything we want. It's our job as their trainer, but the base level is what does the dog like? And so, one of the easiest things to create a relationship with is a tug toy. And for me if I'm going to have my dog tug, I would like the toy to be on a bungee. So that if when the dog grabs it, there's something that gives so that they don't get a jolt on their neck and I don't get a jolt in my back.

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So pretty much most of the toys that I will use have a bungee. Anything to do with engagement, creating relationship, it will have a bungee. Now the end of that bungee is something that the dog finds attractive. So, is it a little squishable ball that the dog likes? Is it something that squeaks?

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This is my puppy's, one of her tug toys are bungee toys and it's got that crinkle that she loves so much. So, what's on the end of— it's not just the tug, it's what's on the end of that tug. Now some of you may use something like retrieving with your dog as a great way to create a bond between you. And if your dog isn't crazy about toy, toys that may be where the food toy comes in. That when the dog brings you back the toy, you open it up and you give them a piece of food.

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So, it's creating a relationship, but they value the food that they get at the end of it. Retrieving, there's so many different things that you can use to retrieve. I have a lot of different ones, depending on what I am looking for. If it's just recreation, it might be my favorite, which I used to use with all my early dogs was something called an Aerobie.

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Now I like this better than a flying disc for two reasons. Number one, I could throw this [Aerobie](#) the length of a football field. I would go to the park and I'd have them all laid down on hill and I would throw the Aerobie and one dog would wait, and one dog would scream down the hill, grab the Aerobie and scream back up. The other reason why I liked it is because it hovered. The dogs could get underneath of it and wait for it to come down. The problem with a lot of flying discs is dogs contort and twist, and they have potential for injury in there. So, love the Aerobie. I will tell you though, that Aerobies are very delicate.



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So, if you have a dog who has a really hard mouth, might not be the first choice for them because they can bend it and it won't fly nearly as good. But my dogs, all of my Border Collies and my Jack Russell Terrier I could use that Aerobie and I would just bend it back into shape. So that's my go-to.

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All right. The three things I strongly encourage you not to use. Number one by far, if you listen to nothing else, please take heed to this one. Do not ever allow a dog to retrieve a stick or even carry sticks when you're out on your walk. And here's the bummer. Dogs love sticks. I don't know why it's wired in them. But if you have another toy, like this one look. Looks like a stick, I've got if your listening, it's a squeaky, squeaky.

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It [looks like a stick, it's red, it's rubber](#), it's made from the people who make our Kong toys. So, you could throw that for your dog. Why don't I like sticks? Number one is I personally know of dogs who have gone after the stick and when they dove at it to pick it up, it impaled right down their throat and just barely missed an artery. Could have killed this one dog. Another dog got it in the chest, it punctured along. Many dogs, they get slivers up under their gums or in their tongue. So please no sticks for dogs. Huge, huge, huge.

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Okay. The other thing that I'm not a fan of, I've already mentioned are flying discs, unless you were a brilliant throw, and you know your dog can— you can throw it in a way that your dog can run out underneath it and grab it. The other thing I don't like are, and lot of you not going to like this one, tennis balls. Yeah. I know a lot of you have those devices that give you more leverage. You can throw it forever. Now my challenge with that is for the same reason's dogs dive in on sticks, they dive in on that tennis ball. And a lot of them will get like a lot of the turf in their bottom of their jaw.

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It's really hard on the adjustment of the neck and the jaw. So, if I'm going to throw something like that, I might ask them to sit just before they get to it. So, they don't have all the momentum of that big, long run diving down on the ball. I'll ask them to sit and then they can get it. All right. So, a great way to build that relationship, I use engagement toys before I train to break up the middle of training and how I wrap up training. It's all about building that great relationship for our dogs.

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The second category of toys that I choose from is it my focus is to **exercise** that dog. Now there is overlap obviously I might use that Aerobie to exercise my dog, but there's things that you can get if you aren't going out and taking your dog for a walk. For example, there's the [iFetch](#) where the dog can load the ball for themselves and then it goes flying out across the field. You can get a lure coursing machine. It's pretty expensive, but it basically, you set up a course like they use for Sighthounds and the dog chases this garbage bag. It's not really a live animal. Trust me.

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And they just chase a garbage bag, get exercise that way. There's a lot of things that you can use something as simple as the [iDig](#), which encourages the dog to dig, which is great exercise for their front end. So I personally will use - I just take my dogs out walking.



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I'll use things like fitness discs for exercise, but there's a lot of you that don't have the advantages that I do in where I live. That allows me the privilege of walking in these beautiful fields. So, you may have to look other places for toys that help exercise your dog. The third category are toys I use to **educate**. AKA toys I use in training.

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Now my favorite training toy of all, the one that I use for all my dogs, you've probably seen it if you've watched any of my videos on YouTube and that is a [bungee with a tiny little raspberry on the end](#), and it has some give but it's small enough that I can fold it up and my dog doesn't know I have it. This one happens to be branded - really nice - DogsThat. This comes from my friends at [4MyMerles](#) and I am going to be giving away one of these for anybody who comments on this post on YouTube.

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So, get on over and you can win my favorite tug toy. All right. So, I use that for everyday training, but there's other specific training. For example, when I'm teaching a recall to a puppy, I want a long toy. So, I've got this same people 4MyMerles that made this one for me. It's a long toy. This one happens to have a squeaky on the end, but what This! really likes is the crinkly bits. So, I like it long because I can run and drag it. And the puppy is learning to chase me and become engaged with that toy.

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If I'm doing something like I want to reward my dog away from me, so I want to teach my dog for a particular sport that they need to get to run further away from me, I need a toy that is weighted. So, I can throw this one decently, but you know something like a cow milker, or if you have a sporting dogs, a [dummy](#) launcher that could have gone in the exercise one, two.

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So, a dummy launcher that would launch dummies. This is a pretend dummy. It's not a real dummy. I know that. So, a dummy is a thing that bird dogs or a lot of the retrievers will retrieve when they're, rather than retrieving a bird. So those are great for being able to throw a long distance. Also, if I'm doing something like jump work, again I don't want my dogs to plow their head into the ground.

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So, if I'm teaching my puppy or my dog jump grids, I'll use something that sticks up off the ground more rather than lying my favorite toy on the ground, I will put a toy that sits up maybe six inches or more off the ground so when they come over it's there. I know that they're not going to concuss their head into the ground when they're going after their toy. So those are toys, some of the many toys that I will use when I'm working with educating my dogs.

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If I was going to use a flying disc for any reason, I would often use one of the cloth flying discs. I really prefer those and there's a lot of different ones out there on the market. Now, Tater Salad when he's training his number one toy of choice, and this was also my oldest dog Encore, she loved the big plastic [Jolly Balls](#), the Jolly Balls on a rope.

I actually made a double Jolly Ball for her. And that's Tater Salad's favorite. So, when you're training is that transfer value you need to find something that your dog loves as your main source for training.



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However, you also need to consider what it is that you're training. So, if I'm training like scent work and I'm teaching my dog to go up a wall to scent something, I can't carry around a big Jolly Ball. So, in that case, I need something that's a lot smaller. So, you need to consider what your dog likes, what has value, and then transfer that value from the big jolly balls to a more pocket-size toy.

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Our fourth category is **eating**. And that is toys that deliver food. Why would we do that? Well, stuffing your dog's entire meal into say a [Kong](#) or a [Toppl](#) is my choice because there's holes throughout it. It's a great way to deliver meals when you're busy. So, I have a friend who they put all their dogs, they load up their dog's meals into the stuffable toys, and then they freeze them. And then they bring them out in the morning and when they're getting ready for work, they can just give their dogs their meals that way.

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They're also great when you're trying to distract your dog, like maybe when you're grooming them you could give them one of a frozen Toppl. Or when you are leaving the house for the day, you can get them a frozen Toppl. So, you can stuff these things full of food, but you can then leave. And the other thing that I like, the topples, I can put a few loose treats in, and I can put the two of them together and then she has to roll them around and cookies will come out that way for them.

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I also like to use these things when I'm traveling. So, if I have to put my dog in a plane, the last thing that I'll do when I say goodbye to them as they're being taken away to load, I'll put a stuffed Kong or stuffed Toppl in there for them. Remember if you're using a Kong, make sure there's air hole in the bottom. That's why I love the Toppls because there's built in air holes.

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The fifth category is pure **entertainment**. You know what, all of our dogs have toys that they just love to play by themselves with. So, it could be a little stuffed animal that's a squeaky. It could be something that brings them more value like the iDig, or I don't know that I'd use an iFetch, you know it sets up so the dog could use it on its own. But I think I would want to supervise that one. It could be things like, Swagger likes to hold his cow milker. So that's something that he likes. That's what he gets great joy from. Entertaining himself while watching the other dogs running around.

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Tater likes to roll on just about every toy going. And so, This! likes to throw her toys around, that's my puppy. So, what is it that your dog likes to do? And I'll have toys around that each of my dogs will play within their own unique way.

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The sixth and final category is that of **enrichment**. And that is how our dogs engage with their environment when we're not around or when we're not part of what they're doing. There's something as simple as letting them shred a paper box or I let my dogs shred toilet papers actually. Every dog I've ever owned from the time I was a kid, I would let them shred paper towel holders, or— but I don't let them eat them so that when I'm watching, I don't just leave them because I don't like them to eat them. I have [Nina Ottoson's](#) educational toys. So, there you can start with easy ones and they're basically food puzzles.



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The dog has to manipulate and move different pieces of plastic around in order for them to figure out how to get the cookie out. So, these are enrichment games, something like a snuffle mat, where the—I've used for our puppies where they just have to find the cookies in the fleece or the material.

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Again, I wouldn't leave that with a ferocious chewer because they might ingest some of those pieces of fluff. You have to be really careful when you're leaving toys for enrichment that the dog's not going to get hurt by accidentally eating the wrong thing. Okay. As I mentioned before, a topple. Two Toppls put together could be that enrichment toy for you, and that is a safe one because it's basically just rubber.

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So, as I mentioned something simple like my tug toy. This is an engagement toy. This comes in as could be exercise, just tugging is exercise. This is definitely a way that I educate because I use it in all of my training. Can't really put food and use it as a way of delivering food. Definitely is a way for my dogs to entertain themselves. And it's definitely not an enrichment toy. I will tell you though, that if I have a young puppy that does not seem to have a great working bond with me, I do not leave toys around for them. I leave bones and stuffed Kongs and things.

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Toys are special for me. Once I know I have that great working relationship, I don't care what toys are left around. So, there you have it. There's all the categories of toys and how I am intentional about how I pick my toys. Now, what about those of you who just don't have the budget to add new toys? I'm going to share with you five toys that aren't going to cost you a nickel, or if they are a couple of pennies.

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So, number one, I've been throwing this around in almost every podcast. I've talk about a cow milker. Well, maybe I'm exaggerating again. In some past podcasts, I've talked about a cow milker. This is an infla—I'm going to educate you now. It's a cow milker inflation. It's food quality grade rubber. And so, this goes inside of a milking machine where cows get milked.

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All right. dairy farmers throw these out every six weeks or maybe more. And so, because they can't use them anymore. And so, if you just drive by your friendly dairy farmer, look for the silos, knock on the door. Don't tell them I sent you or don't be obnoxious about it. However, if you know a dairy farmer, just ask them, "Do you throw these out?" and "Can I grab some?"

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They might have a little bit of cow poop on them so you might have to give them a good cleaning. Or you can just go to a store and buy a box of four. That would cost money, but I'm just telling you. There's the first free one. Second one, grab yourself an old sock. Put all of your dog's favorite treats in it. This is for the people whose dogs don't like toys naturally. Tie it off in the bottom.

And you could soak it in water and ring it out, but that is a food sock that the dog's going to want to dive for as a great reinforcement value. But you've got to - number one, never leave your dog alone with this because they could ingest that sock.



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Never leave your dog alone with any toys really, unless they're made for enrichment. But definitely not with the food talk. All right. So that's a cheap way. You could also take an old t-shirt or if you have some old pieces of felt lying around, braid yourself a little tug toy, boom.

And if your dog doesn't like toys, you can braid in some pieces of food right into the braid. What, how cool is that? All right, so we've got a cow milker, we've got a braided fleece toy, we've got our food sock.

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You can take a tennis ball, put it inside an old sock, tie it off, and then you've got a great throwable toy.

The problem with tennis balls and using them in training is they bounce, and you can't predict where they're going to move and land.

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And one of the big rules about training, effective training, is you got to be conscientious about wherever you place the reinforcement. And if you're throwing something that you can't control the placement of, it kind of ruins your training.

Putting a ball in a sock, Boom Shaka Laka, and you've got a toy. That's a ball that the dog may like, that is going—you're going to have more control over where it lands.

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All right. And finally, this one you need, you know, you need grownup supervision before you do this one.

Take a tennis ball, put it in a vice, take a box cutter under the adult supervision and cut a slit in that ball. And then get somebody who can operate a drill press. Maybe do the drill pressing first. Put a hole in there that you can feed a string through that.

So now you have a tennis ball on a string with a slit in it. And the slit opens up like those kids change purses and you can drop little food in there.

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And now you've got another food toy that you can play with your dog even if they don't like toys just yet, because all dogs can be taught to love toys. It's just a transfer of value. Listen, this is part two in a podcast series that I'm talking about the caveats and what you should be doing with your toys.

So, if you haven't listened to [episode 54](#), please, please go back and listen to that one, because it will give you a lot more insight into how I select toys and why I'm very intentional about what I'm doing with them.

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And before I leave, to answer my opening question, what would be the best toy to choose when you wanted to teach a dog to retrieve? Some of you might've said, "Oh, the squeaky toy. Because dogs like squeaky toys so they're more likely to bring it back".

The challenge is that dogs do like squeaky toys. And so, they're more likely to self reward by squeaking and squeaking and squeaking rather than bringing a toy directly to you.

And when you first introduce the act of retrieving, you want a dog to go out, pick it up, run back.



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That's why you wouldn't also, wouldn't pick a toy that you stuffed food in. Now, some of you might've said, "Well my dog doesn't like toys. And so, I have to use the one with the food in". On nay nay. You want to use something that's otherwise boring for the dog.

Remember, good dog training is a transfer of value. So, we're going to take what your dog loves. Good treats. We're going to transfer it into the act of bringing this back. It's all explained and or those of you who have seen my program, Bring Me!, it's all explained in the bring me where it's all about teaching the retrieve. That's it for today. I'll see you next time on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

[Podcast Episode 54: Dog Toy Checklist: What's Good and What to Avoid Vlog Post: Retrieve Games](#)

[Vlog Post: Retrieve Games](#)

[4MyMerles Creations](#)

[West Paw Toppl Treat Toys](#)

[Nina Ottosson Puzzle Game Toys](#)

[Aerobie Sprint Flying Ring](#)

[Chuckit! Amphibious Bumper](#)

[King Squeezz Stick](#)

[Jolly Pets Romp-n-Rope Ball](#)

[iFetch Interactive Ball Launchers for Dogs](#)

[iDig Digging Toy by iFetch](#)



About Susan

A world-leading educator of dog trainers, Susan is also one of the most successful agility competitors of the last three decades. She has won multiple Gold Medals at National or World Championship events with every dog she has ever owned over the past 30 years. Susan was one of the very first dog trainers to share knowledge online when she opened her "Clicker Dogs" website many years ago. Susan has helped hundreds of thousands of people enjoy a great relationship with their dogs through her workshops and keynote speaking around the world, award winning books, DVDs, magazine articles, blog posts, podcasts, free dog training and dog agility video series, and online dog training programs.



A natural teacher and an entertaining speaker, Susan is world renowned for her dog training knowledge and practical application of that knowledge. Her understanding of how to apply science-based learning principles to both competitive and family pet dog training has been pivotal in changing how dogs are trained.

Susan is now helping many thousands of dog owners in 82 countries have the best relationship possible with their dogs. The real joy for her comes from bringing confidence to dogs and their owner through playful interactions and relationship building games that are grounded firmly in the science of how animals learn.



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