

Dogs Swimming: 5 Must Do Steps For Dogs Who Hate Or Love The Water

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

00:00:00

SG It's summertime here in the Northern hemisphere which means swimming for the dogs of course. There are two types of dogs when it comes to swimming. Those that are crazy about swimming and those that really would rather not. And today's podcast is for both groups of dogs. Super important for both of them.

00:00:31

Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. Now, if you've been following along the podcast, you know we do things different. We train everything differently than most people and swimming is no exception. Because I actually want to teach my dog to swim. You know, there are some dogs that as puppies they go, "Oh, water! I love it in there!"

00:00:56

Off they go and you go, "Yay! Look at my puppy swimming, isn't this wonderful?" Actually, it's not so wonderful. Because dogs who just naturally want to swim turn into dogs who really, really love to swim. "Oh Susan, I don't see your point." Stick with me on this. Because dogs who just love to swim are going to leave you, leave work, leave anything they can to go into the water if there's water nearby.

00:01:23

I've been at agility trials where dogs will leave their run and just go into a pond. I've been at an agility trial where at the end of the day somebody had to borrow a canoe to go out into the pond to get their dog because the dog would not come back when they're called. Your recall might be great on land, but a dog who loves a swim, that is a different kettle of fish. Pardon the pun because it was a really, really bad one. Is it really a pun? No. And why are fish in a kettle anyway?

00:01:52

So, dogs who don't have stimulus control over swimming, they actually could get into some danger because a lot of these dogs will you know, start biting or barking or maybe biting at the water. And that may redirect onto another dog. We might have somebody calling somebody something about their mother in army boots and then all heck breaks out.

00:02:13

Or, you have a dog who redirect on their person. Or you have those dogs that just loop the pond or the pool because they're just getting so amped up about the thought of swimming or about other people swimming.

00:02:26

So, dogs who love to swim, yeah that's great. But not when you don't have any kind of control over those dogs. Sadly, I know of three people whose dogs died in their own pond on their own property, two of which were amazing swimmers. So, I want my dogs to know, we have a pond here. I want them to know you can go in there [when I invite you to go in there](#), and at no other time. Super important.



Dogs Swimming: 5 Must Do Steps For Dogs Who Hate Or Love The Water

00:02:54

Now, why do we care about dogs swimming? “You know what Susan my dog doesn't like the water and I'm fine with it.” Well guess what, at some point you're gonna want to bath your dog or maybe they're gonna get muddy and you're gonna want to hose them off. I love that I get buy-in from my dogs. So, if I call my dog over after swimming and I want to maybe get some mud off of them, they'll happily stand there.

00:03:16

I don't have to hold them, I call them over, I can hose them down and then I let them go when they're done. Completely cooperative between the dog and I. I ask, they say “sure. I'd like that.” Why? Because it's been conditioned. So, it's important for dogs that you have to bath. You don't want them to put that [pinned ears, open eyes, big fear](#) hiding somewhere, quivering in a corner because you might be wanting to bath them.

00:03:44

Nobody likes to see that sight. You might want to take them to an underwater treadmill at some point. And let's face it, swimming is great exercise for dogs. Or at the very minimal, it's a great way for a dog to cool off just to go for a dunk in the summertime when it's a really hot day. So, it's worth your time to at the very least, teach your dog to like water. To tolerate and to be compliant when you want to do something around water.

00:04:09

But I think it's great to teach the dogs to love water. My last three dogs did not like water as puppies. They actually were a little afraid of the water. And I now have turned those three dogs, all of my dogs, it is every dog's [number one reinforcement](#), is the chance to go for a swim.

00:04:30

And so, I use that high value reinforcement to build reinforcement for other things that are important to me. Like coming when called, or walking on a loose leash, or even agility skills, take the biggest value reward and build it into things that are important because that also gives a transfer of value for you.

00:04:50

And so, it's worth it. You don't want a dog who just wants to run off and swim. You want to have that criteria of waiting for a cue, and you want a dog that loves to swim. So, my goal is that the dog loves water. They love to swim that they have it under stimulus control. That they know that they don't race around the pool or the pond while other dogs are swimming.

00:05:12

And then this is a biggie, I want my dogs to swim, period. Meaning, I don't want to have to be the loading dummy machine that just keeps throwing things for them while they're in the water. I want them to swim. Sure, if I throw a toy my dogs will retrieve it.

00:05:30

And for dogs who might bite at the water, I will give them a toy to hold while they're swimming. But don't bring it out and expect me to throw it over and over again. Why? Number one, because they use their bodies differently when they're pulling with their front end to get to a toy.



Dogs Swimming: 5 Must Do Steps For Dogs Who Hate Or Love The Water

00:05:46

The back end doesn't really do as much work. Number two, their exercise or their time in the water is dependent upon you facilitating that. And if you're at a place where there's a lot of dogs, then there can be a competition with, "Hey, that's my toy." "No, my mom threw it." "No, I have a toy like that." "No, it's mine." "No, I'm bigger than you." You don't want that. If I tell my dogs go for a swim, they do that. They just go for a swim. They just putty around.

00:06:08

And I like to get my dogs to hold a toy, but you don't have to. If they don't bite at the water, they're just swimming. Such a great advantage to have a dog who just swims. Now let's face it some dogs are just afraid of the water. Why is that? Some dogs don't like the feeling of moisture or the wet on their feet. They don't like it when it rains outside.

00:06:30

I tell you what my new puppy Belief, absolutely a big no on anything wet. She doesn't like her face wet. She doesn't like her paws wet. She doesn't like it when it rains. So, she's gonna be a lot of fun to teach to swim. But I have no doubt in my mind that she is going to be a swimmer just like the rest of my dogs.

00:06:47

So, some dogs they just don't like it. They don't like their face wet. They don't like their paws wet. They just don't like to be wet. And so, we have to take things slowly and counter condition it. Some dogs have been John Wayned. Alright. Have you seen the old Western John Wayne movie where he picks up somebody's kid and just throws him in the pond as a way to teach them to swim because the kids are afraid to swim?

00:07:07

They call that flooding. And here we are yet with another pun. People believe that a way to overcome fears with some animals, including dogs, is to just throw them into the deep end of the pool. And here we are, this is the podcast of metaphors, is it not? And so, they want to you know, "You're gonna learn to like it. So, I'm just gonna keep throwing you in and eventually you're gonna go, "Hey wait, this is actually fun. I'm swimming in chocolate. This is awesome!""

00:07:33

And guess what, for every dog that ends up liking it there's probably a trillion that end up going "I don't like water. I don't like swimming. And now I don't trust you." So really bad idea, really bad idea to just push your dog in the water and think that they're gonna learn to like it. So, some dogs are just sensitive, and some dogs don't like the sensation of floating.

00:07:54

And so, what we're gonna do is I've got a five-step process, and the sixth step is actually getting them out into a swim. But five steps to get to condition to put controls in place that for the crazy dogs that like to swim we were gonna add some criteria to that behavior.

00:08:11

And for the dogs who are a little bit worried, we're gonna give you five steps that you can teach your dog to love water. Step number one, you need to buy yourself one of those plastic kiddie pools.



Dogs Swimming: 5 Must Do Steps For Dogs Who Hate Or Love The Water

00:08:20

Now, you could start with this in your living room. I do it outside. But have at it. If you want to do it in your living room. Because all we want to do is shape the dog to jump in, throw some cookies in the pool. Once they're in, tell them "search", they eat the cookies, they jump out, give them a lower value cookie when they jump out.

That's all that we want in step one that they go, "Well, I don't know why you want me in here." There's no water in here, guys. Remember this is your living room. No water. It's an empty pool.

00:08:47

You might want to put a rock in the middle. I like to put a rock in the middle, more on that later. Especially if it's outside it won't blow away, but I use it for the training. Jump in, get cookies. If your dog likes to tug, we can tug when they're in there and we're just shaping them to get in and get out.

00:09:03

Once that's going tickety-boo, I want you to add a name and three different behaviors. So, I just tell my dogs "Go get in" which I think is really a lame name. Last week I had a student here and I suggested she used the cue "dunkaroo". "Dunkaroo" doesn't sound anything like anything else we use so it's very specific, "go and jump into the water".

00:09:28

Even though there's no water right now, I get it, there's no water. Eventually 'dunkaroo' is really gonna mean water. So, step one is just shaping. Step two adding a cue, which means you're gonna walk around the pool and you're gonna give your dog's cookies on the outside. So, the pool's on the inside, the dogs on the outside. You're just gonna give them cookies for not jumping across and going in the pool.

00:09:50

And if they go "Wait, there's better cookies on the inside.", just get further away and then stop, ask them sit and then give them the cue so that they can jump in and get more cookies. Eventually you want to be able to walk with the dog on the inside so that they're closer to the pool.

00:10:04

Now, some dogs might jump in and jump out, kind of like musical chairs. Like "Is it now you want me to do this? Do I jump in there now?" We want the dog to not jump in until you give them their cue. And it's very, very clear. Empty pool. There's nothing driving them crazy saying, "Oh, I got to get in here because look at all my friends are swimming." No.

00:10:22

Just an empty pool. You don't go in there until I give you the cue. Now, for those of you who have dogs that are crazy, you might have to stay at this step a little bit longer. Adding now three behaviors, sit, down, and spin.

If your dog doesn't know how to spin, it's super easy. You can go to the YouTube video that I have on [target training](#), or you could get super simple just put a [cookie in your hand](#) and use it as a lure.



Dogs Swimming: 5 Must Do Steps For Dogs Who Hate Or Love The Water

00:10:47

I want the dog to do those three specific behaviors. For number one the sit, they're gonna have the sensation eventually of water on their butt. "Ooh. Don't like that." And so that's the first introduction to, "This is something you may or may not like at first but promise you're gonna learn to love it."

00:11:05

Number two is the down. For two reasons. Number one, the dog can cool off a lot easier if they're in that down position. Number two, it's easier way for them to not be a problem if they're sharing a pool with other dogs. But I really like it because it submerses their whole body, and we see what they do and don't like about this water before we take them into a lake or a river to swim.

00:11:27

And the third one, the spin, is because there is water in there it starts sloshing around and they're gonna feel water splashing up on their face. And we're gonna overcome all of these challenges just with those three little behaviors.

00:11:42

And you're gonna keep tugging, which there'll be some slushing there. If your dog doesn't like tugging, that's fine. We can still throw cookies in and tell them to eat the cookies even when there's water in there. So now we're on two step three. Step three we're gonna leave the pool. You just got to find a hose, a garden hose, and a piece of concrete.

00:12:00

So, if you live in the country, you're gonna have to go visit a friend. And what I want you to do is you're going to just wet the concrete first, and you're going to tell your dog search. And so, they're just eating the cookies off the wet concrete. "Oh, I can do that." Now we're gonna turn the water on really, really low, and you're gonna drop the cookies onto the concrete with the water streaming.

00:12:20

So eventually the water will take the cookies down the concrete a little bit. They've got to be really high value reinforcement guys. So don't cheap out on these really, really good cookies. Eventually, we're gonna turn the water pressure up a little bit more. I mean, we're not fire hosing it or anything.

00:12:36

We're just turning up a little bit of pressure so that the cookie you know, you add one cookie and the dog's like chasing it a little bit on the concrete. Make sure it's safe. Like you're not turning this out to go out down on the driveway into traffic. It's just a fun game of 'chase the cookie in the stream of water'.

00:12:51

What we're doing here is allowing the dog to be introduced to the sensation of the pads and maybe the tops of their feet are getting wet, but it's all being done in the context of a fun game, no pressure. Again, throughout this process it's your dog who dictates the pace. I'm gonna say this one more time. If you've got an appointment for swimming lessons with your dog on the seventh, you might have to cancel that because only your dog knows how fast this is gonna go. Because for some dogs it may be fast if they're really driven by food. For others that they're really fearful and had a bad experience it might take a little longer, but it's still possible. You just have to be patient.



Dogs Swimming: 5 Must Do Steps For Dogs Who Hate Or Love The Water

00:13:29

So, we've got dogs who will dive into the stream of water and grab cookies and everything's hunky-dory. Now we're moving on to step four. We're gonna take that pool outside, with the rock in it so it doesn't blow away. I like it on a little bit of an angle. It doesn't have to be much. And sometimes the pool itself, just the structure of it will create an angle because here's what I want to do.

00:13:50

I want to put a thin layer of water at the bottom, but about a quarter of the pool doesn't have any water at all. And I'm gonna do the 'dunkaroo, go get in game' where the dog gets in, gets a cookie, gets out. But you can point to them "Look, it's safe. Look, I'm your friend. I'm looking out for you. You can jump in where there's no water."

00:14:09

And they can jump in there's water in the pool, but not where they're standing. And you're just gonna do "search", grab the cookie out of the water, get them out. Don't have them think about, "Oh, I'm in here and there's water. And then do I get the cookie?" No, just grab that cookie and get out. High, high, high value reinforcement.

00:14:25

Eventually we want to get that dog doing our sit, down, stand, spin. They can do it on the dry spot at first, and then walking around the pool, getting cookies, you're gonna say "search". It's a very, very thin layer. Doesn't even cover their pads. So, their pads are gonna get wet. The hair between their feet are gonna get wet.

00:14:44

Eventually at this stage we're gonna add enough water that it covers the tops of their feet. You don't go onto the next stage until you can get the entire pool with that thin layer of water covering their paws. Honestly, if you've worked through these stages really slowly, your dogs are gonna go, "Yeah, I got this. What's the big deal? Yeah!" And the first time they sit and get their butt full of water, they might pop right back up. You tell them to get out, play a game and get that back in.

00:15:13

Don't let them think about it. "Yes. My butt got wet. What the heck just happened there?" Now we're ready to move on to stage number five. This is the big time. Stage five we are raising the level of the water until it's at the dog's pasterns. If we can get our sit, down, stand, spin here it will be very quickly to move it up to the level of the dog's neck when they're in a down position.

00:15:40

So, quickly we move the level of the water up to its the base of the dog's neck when they're in a down position. Obviously for a little dog that's gonna be a lot lower than say for my Border Collies. I like that level because their body is all wet. We know if they've dealt with things, "I didn't like my back wet." "I didn't like my butt wet." "I didn't like my arms wet." So, we've dealt with all of that.

00:16:03

We've got the dogs a place that can be cool when we're doing this in the summer. And by the way, when you get to stage five, pick a hot day in the summer to do it. Because you've taken them for a little walk, you're gonna walk them around the pool and then tell them go "dunkaroo", they're gonna be hot.



Dogs Swimming: 5 Must Do Steps For Dogs Who Hate Or Love The Water

00:16:17

They're gonna go, "Oh yeah. I think I do want to do a dunkaroo. I don't know. This sounds like a lot, this is fun. I think I'm gonna like this." So, remember stage five all the way up, your dog's success is what guides them. And if you don't know what success looks like, go back to [podcast number 157](#) and evaluate your dog's body language. What are they telling you?

00:16:39

If they're saying I'm a little apprehensive about this, go on back up a couple steps and have at it, make it fun, grow that confidence. Do not be in a hurry. So, you've accomplished stage five. Now, what I would like you to do is take your dog on a walk to a conservation area where there might be a low stream and do the same thing in a low stream.

00:16:57

If you've got another dog who likes water, let them kind of trail in front of the dog that's new to this. And before long, your dog will be running in the stream. Now we want to try and do it in a lake. A lake with a beach, or a river with a beach where your dog can walk out is always best. If you go out and swim with them, ideal. And here's where something I should have added before. For some dogs, I will have them swim with [a life jacket](#) for the first few months when they're swimming.

00:17:25

Especially dogs with a ewe neck. Now, a dog structurally with an ewe neck that looks like they have a little bump here because they have a bend in their neck. Some of those dogs, they swim vertically. Naturally their back doesn't float along the water. Now my girl Feature, double pictures of Feature today if you're watching this on YouTube. My girl Feature had a ewe neck.

00:17:48

And so, as a youngster when I was doing all of this with her, she swam kind of perpendicular in the water. She swam with a life jacket for six months and I eventually weaned it off of her. But all of my dogs, I put them in a life jacket every once in a while, because I think it's just good to use their body muscles differently.

00:18:05

Obviously, it creates buoyancy. Obviously, it gives them more security. So, every dog when I start them off swimming, I start them off in a life jacket. Because it just takes away that hysteria. So, you're at the lake. You might want to go in, you might have other dogs that go in, "dunkaroos", have at it, and you will see a different layer of confidence.

00:18:29

Again, only if you're patient. Now, for those of you who have a pool, and you have that first step that the dog has to go down. That might take more counterconditioning. For me, for my youngest dog This! I actually built a ramp for her to walk down into the water that seemed to really help her because she was small.

00:18:47

And that first step is a big first step for a dog that wasn't very tall. Okay there you have it. Five, six steps to get your dog swimming, well five steps to get your dog loving the water.





Episode: #162

Dogs Swimming: 5 Must Do Steps For Dogs Who Hate Or Love The Water

00:18:58

Please jump over to YouTube and let me know how you liked it. And while you're here, if you're not a subscriber, hit the subscribe button and the notification bell. Because listen, we've got a lot more really entertaining educational dog training videos coming at you.

00:19:14

I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

[YouTube Video: Susan Garrett Riffs on Transfer of Value in Dog Training \(and water loving Labradors\)](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Cooperative Care and Consent in Dog Training](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Reinforcement, Permissions and Transfer of Value in Dog Training with Susan Garrett](#)

[YouTube Video: Target Stick Training for Dogs Part 1](#)

[YouTube Video: Target Stick Training for Dogs Part 2](#)

[Podcast Episode 157: Dog Body Language: Understanding Canine Communication Signals And Emotions](#)

[Dog Life Jacket: Salus Skippy Dog Vest](#)



Dogs Swimming: 5 Must Do Steps For Dogs Who Hate Or Love The Water

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.



Meet Us Online

- Website <https://dogsthat.com>
- Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/SusanGarrettDogAgility/>
- Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/SusanGarrettDogsThat/>
- TikTok <https://www.tiktok.com/@dogsthat>
- LinkedIn <https://www.linkedin.com/company/dogsthat>
- Pinterest <https://pinterest.ca/dogsthatcom/>
- Twitter <https://twitter.com/susangarrett>
- YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/c/DogsThat>
- YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/user/ClickerDogs>

