



K9 Nose Work®

You release your dog into a room where dozens of containers are randomly scattered—only three of the containers have treats inside. You stand back as your dog begins sniffing around the room at the containers (no hints to your dog, but she knows you are there in the room with her). When your dog finds the first treat-loaded container you praise her enthusiastically and give additional treats, and then step back as she continues to search for more. She rapidly moves from container to container, once does a double-take to return to another of the hidden treats. In less than a minute she has worked the room and found all three treats.

WITH CINDY SMITH, THE RIGHT STEPS. PHOTOS BY MELODY HENKEL

Even though you have seen your Basenji sniff the air on outdoor walks and sometimes get her nose very close to (or in) something highly suspicious, you are amazed at how disciplined and focused she is during these exercises.

After three more such searches (with breaks in between while other dogs get their turn, always one dog at a time) the training session ends and you return home with a happy (and tired) basenji. It was an unusual training session because your dog seemed to know exactly what to do without any help from you. Indeed the one getting the training was the human: resisting the impulse to interfere and give clues, promptly rewarding and praising after the dog finds the treat, noticing what

the dog is doing, asking the trainer about how the dog locates the treat, observing the rules for removing your dog from the room via a separate door after the exercise.

Many dog-owners have invented similar “hide and seek” games with their dogs, but K9 Nose Work introduces rigor and a formal training progression, which moves from the introductory level described above to the more complex tasks for dogs to locate one specific odor among many, even in distracting environments. After stepping through the levels of training and getting a dog ready for stardom on some CSI television series, it is natural to look for some of the competitive aspects of the trade.

What is K9 Nose Work?

Ron Gaunt, Amy Herot and Jill-Marie O’Brien are certified canine-detection experts who have worked with Police Departments in training canine-unit dogs for detecting explosives and narcotics. They founded the NACSW to ensure the highest standard of excellence for competitors in the sport of K9 Nose Work and to cultivate a community of enthusiastic dog lovers and dog sport competitors. These three founders pioneered the concept of detection-style training and competition for pet dogs, finding great enthusiasm among dog lovers for their unique talents in developing and executing canine sporting events that truly bonded dog and human, and were lots of fun, too.

The first official NACSW trial was held in January of 2009, in Southern California, and since then there have been over 135 trials in 17 states. NACSW K9 Nose Work trials have earned a reputation for being an exciting, supportive venue to compete with your dog. Trials are all day events and require a large number of volunteers - typically NACSW members and competitors—to deliver the NACSW K9 Nose Work trial experience.

NACSW founders, faculty, and other key persons continue to bring K9 Nose Work to every dog and dog lover through workshops and seminars around the country. The NACSW is also dedicated to educating and certifying passionate, highly skilled instructors for the activity & sport of K9 Nose Work, helping to bring K9 Nose Work to dogs and their people around the globe.

Comments from a trainer

Cindy Smith

Owner/Trainer of “The Right Steps” in Fair Oaks, California

I had done some casual hide-and-see type games with my overly sensitive male dog in a safely fenced-in environment. He was good at it, liked doing it, and felt comfortable in the safe well-bounded setting. I had heard about K9 Nose Work and decided to pursue training with their certified trainers and all three of my dogs. It was fun and had great

results, especially for reducing my reactive male dog’s environmental sensitivity and building his confidence. I knew then that I wanted to offer this kind of Nose Work training to my clients. I pursued becoming a certified trainer and 771.5 hours of training later achieved my goal.

I am very enthusiastic about this kind of training because there is so much to learn from experienced K9 Nose Work Trainers—and there is also a lot to learn from our amazing dogs! Nose Work teaches us humans to take the time to watch our dogs and their hyper-sensitive smelling ability in action, and become attuned to reading their body language. It also fosters two-way trust between dog and human and is an invaluable bonding experience.

Whether or not you decide to enter competitions you will find the experience of partnering with your dog in Nose Work to be a very positive experience. If you are curious, the best way to start is by visiting the NACSW website, contact a certified trainer near you, and ask to observe a training class. The website also shows sites for competitions in your area to attend and see what experienced Nose Work dogs can do.

The benefits I have seen for my clients is gratifying to me for having introduced them to Nose Work. And of course, the real benefit is for the dog. It makes for a very tired yet happy dog after a session. Because the exercises are only one dog at a time, it builds confidence and focus in even extremely shy/fearful/reactive dogs. Puppies, senior dogs, physically challenged dogs can all excel at Nose Work. The same “everybody plays” is true for owners, especially those who may be physically limited in doing agility work with their dogs or handling them for coursing.

By giving your dog a safe job that they love to do with you nearby, Nose Work makes for better pets and owners. You get to experience the world anew via the sensitive nose of your dog—it is an amazing experience. 🐾

FOR MORE INFORMATION

<http://www.nacsw.net/home>

—includes listing of certified trainers by state and city