

Advice on dogs, life and love



ask dog lady

Dear Dog Lady,

Your articles are great. We have a golden retriever, a 10-year-old female. She is a great dog. Within the past year or two she is really slowing down. But what has really changed is her breath. We have tried many things without results. Do you have any suggestions for her bad breath? —Bob

Bob, backatcha, Dog Lady would be nothing without her readers—and her dog. Thanks for the compliment. Now, let's get down to business: Please, have your dear golden retriever's teeth cleaned.

Even healthy dog breath can smell a bit gamy, wouldn't you agree? But when the breath-o-meter starts to plunge into the rank category, the problem is usually dirty teeth, unhealthy gums, or stomach problems. You will need to see your veterinarian. As a venerable senior, your dog is probably due for some oral health care.

For everyone else, you can keep your dogs' teeth a little whiter by doling out chewies on a daily basis. Crunchy kibble instead of soft food helps to clean the back teeth; so do hard biscuits, bones, and bully sticks. For prolonged chewing pleasure, bully sticks (a dried unmentionable part of the bull) digest better than rawhide, in Dog Lady's dog's humble opinion. Also, there have been some problems reported with Greenies Dental Chews, which prevent Dog Lady from recommending these wholeheartedly.

Privyvet (Dear) Dog Lady,

As someone who is new to the America, I hope I can turn to you to answer a question about this wonderful (though at times very odd) country. In my country of Turkmenistan, our dogs are valued for protecting our homes. They perform this function well and in return we feed them. Here, however, it seems they are treated as fuzzy four-legged children. Some people even list them as members of their family. I find this endearing though, honestly, quite strange. Could you please shed some light on this matter for me? —Guych

Privyvet Guych, receipt of your mail made Dog Lady look over her shoulder for Borat, imagining how the

sight of a Yorkshire terrier dressed up in hot pink and pushed in a baby stroller might play out for comedian Sacha Baron Cohen.

Yes, some of us excessively dote on our dogs here in America. Dog Lady understands why Turkmenis—or anybody in a less developed country—might look upon this canine coddling as strange, even indicative of a flawed society. After all, for a dog anywhere in the world, a stinky, chewed-up tennis ball is a luxury. Still, we spend money on them.

We live in the richest country, a land glutted with electronic devices that are supposed to keep us connected. Yet, many of us feel isolated. Somehow, the detachment has resulted in a golden era for pets. They have become proxy children and best friend substitutes. This may not be the healthiest thing—especially for dogs ill-equipped to serve as psychological place-holders for humans—but it reflects a deeper need for simplicity, innocence, and unconditional companionship.

Dear Dog Lady,

I feel like I'm trapped in an old marriage with my dog. I'm bored.

Things used to be exciting when Ollie, a Cairn terrier, was a puppy. The world was new for both of us. We loved our walks, our games, our times. Those were the good old days. After six years, we seem to have settled into a dull routine.

On our walks, I grow impatient and yank his leash when he pokes along. I am weary of his unwavering obsessions with squirrels and squeaky toys. He mentally tires me out with all his bristling terrier intensity and obstinacy.

Please don't think me heartless. Ollie is a great dog. I can never imagine giving him up. I figure we're stuck together for the duration. But how can I revive the relationship? —Felicia

Dear Felicia, you have a case of ennui unleash-a. Actually, it's good you're honest about all this. Having any living creature constantly in your face and sharing your space can be taxing at times. Such is the nature of the commitment beast. Many of us hide our boredom with our dogs, our kids, our jobs, our spouses. You give voice to those who only think these things but don't say them.

The glory of dogs is that they never tire of the same-old-same-old. Be mindful that Ollie is experiencing no similar lassitude. He doesn't notice anything is different, except as he may pick up vibes of your impatience and indifference. Even then, your dog forgives you. Ollie is not the one who bears any responsibility to jazz up the relationship.

The burden is entirely upon you to feel better about yourself—and, please, do not yank his chain. Boredom is usually a symptom of something else.

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