

Chillin' Out with "Pupsicles" and Frozen Kongs

by Tala Davis



Pupsicles are great for enrichment, while **frozen Kongs** are better for helping prevent separation anxiety – that's because chewing is soothing for dogs, the same way that sucking their thumbs can be soothing for children. With the pupsicles, they either get eaten or melt away pretty quickly. With Kongs, even when the filling is gone the Kong is a chew toy.

For a dog with developed separation anxiety, Kongs can be a nice addition to other things but aren't going to make a huge difference. Where Kongs can be awesome, though, is in teaching puppies (and newly adopted adult dogs) that "the human is leaving" is actually something to look forward to.

Cool training tools!

1. Keep "alone time" Kong fillings super special, so your pup looks forward to them. You can feed other things, even the dog's meals, in a Kong, but save the good stuff for when your pup will be alone.
2. Start very, very small. Give the pup the Kong while in a crate or pen with you in the room – this teaches that being physically separated is no big deal & a chance for some quality snacking time.
3. Gradually increase the distance between you and the pup's enclosure – just outside the room (or out of sight within the same room), in a room next door, further away in the house, etc. – you want the pup to stay focused on the Kong and not stress out, so if the pup gets anxious, take a step back.
4. Once the pup is happy to chill and eat the Kong while you wander around the house, start increasing how long you leave the pup alone for – at first, be sure to come back ***before*** the pup has a chance to finish the Kong, and encourage the pup to come out, leaving the rest behind. The pup should REALLY want to get back in and finish up the goody – that's great! Give him a chance to get at it again a little while later, along with another treat or chewy for when it's gone.
5. Then start adding some extra chewies to the enclosure while the pup's working on the Kong, leaving for about a minute longer than it takes the pup to finish the Kong. Gradually build up the time you're away. There should always be other good stuff to chew on or play with, so that the Kong starts the fun but doesn't end it.
6. Ultimately, many pups can't wait for you to get ready to head out so they can have their puppy party!

Recipes!

Pupsicles

1. Depending on the size of the dog, these can be made in everything from ice cube trays to plastic cups or yogurt cups to buckets! Because they're mostly water, they're good for dogs on diets, too. For safety, make sure each popsicle is too big to fit into the dog's mouth whole. Mix and match ingredients based on your dog's preferences!

2. ¼ c. low-sodium stock or broth (avoid garlic and onions if possible) – or pumpkin puree (with no added ingredients) or applesauce – or yogurt
3. ¾ c. water
4. A few treats, mix and match: Dog treats of any kind your dog likes, but should be smallish. Pieces of apple, blueberries, cooked squash, carrots, etc. (raisins and grapes are toxic to dogs!) – fresh or dried. Bits of cooked, unsalted meat. Anything else your dog loves!
5. Put enough treats in each popsicle mold to mostly cover the bottom (it's fine to use fewer!).
6. Mix the water and your choice of flavoring (broth, puree, etc.).
7. Pour into mold & freeze.
8. Serve in a dish, on a towel, or even float them in a tub or water bowl and let your dog go bobbing for pupsicles!

Frozen Kongs

1. Be sure to choose the appropriate size of Kong for your dog. Note that the color of the Kong indicates how much chewing it can handle – power chewers should get black Kongs!
2. Place Kong into a mug or other container it stands vertical, with the small end down.
3. Plug the hole at the tip of the small end with a treat (a bit of cheese or peanut butter works well).
4. Smear a very thin layer of something sticky around the inside of the Kong – peanut butter, sunflower butter, and tahini all work well, as do the pastes Kong sells, baby food, and anything else that's a similar texture. *(Some nuts are toxic to dogs, so check before using other types of nut butters. Also be ABSOLUTELY sure that there's no Xylitol in your peanut - or any other - butter! Xylitol is a sweetener now being added to lots of things and it's deadly to dogs.)*
5. Fill the middle of the Kong with any combination of ingredients your dog likes (you can use kibble to bulk it up a bit, but make sure to include special stuff, too!). Layer the ingredients or mix them all together. Why not try...
 - The same filling you'd use in a pupsicle – then freeze!
 - Wet food or kibble soaked in low-sodium broth
 - Freeze-dried dog food or treats (you can soak it in water or use it dry)
 - Ground or chopped meat (cooked and fat drained off)
 - Cottage cheese or yogurt
 - Fruit chunks (unsweetened) – blueberries, apple, pear, and mango tend to be favorites
 - Veggies such as raw carrot pieces, cooked squash, fresh or frozen peas
 - Dog treats
 - Mashed potatoes or rice
 - Scrambled eggs
 - Seal the top with another thin layer of sticky stuff!
6. Kong can be frozen for a bigger challenge or served fresh/refrigerated. Many dogs need to learn how to get into a Kong, so it's best to start with a Kong that's spread with something like cream cheese or peanut butter on the inside. Teach the dog to lick it out, then move to a filled but not frozen Kong. Then graduate to frozen Kongs once your pup's a master Kong-conquerer!