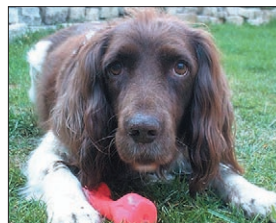




Springer Spaniels love to use their brains. And what they love most is using their brains while interacting with their owners. Mental stimulation will not only reduce stress and boredom in your dog, but will also help to build the bond between you. Playing will build your skills in controlling your dog, and 'reading' his reactions. An active game will also help with providing a healthy level of exercise for your Springer.



### Retrieve

Many Springers are natural retrievers. Some however will need a bit of encouragement to get started! You will need a toy that is interesting enough that your dog will go to fetch it. Usually one of 'your' toys will do the trick here. Then, there has to be a reason for your dog to want to return to you with the toy. A lot of Springers will bring it back for the fun of having it thrown again, but some may need to learn by swapping it for a treat at first.

It is worth teaching your Springer a nice controlled delivery of the retrieved toy. Fetch can be an exciting game for Springers, and putting in some standards for them to achieve helps to stretch their minds, and keeps the game, and their energy levels, under your control.

### Search

A more advanced game for the Springer who reliably retrieves is a search game. For this you hide a toy in the house or garden, and reward the dog for finding it and bringing it to you. Again, the toy has to be one that the dog values, and there needs to be a reward for bringing it to you – perhaps the chance to retrieve the toy when you throw it! You can start building towards search play with the Small Box Game (see over).

Remember, time spent in constructive, controlled play with your Springer will not only work his body and mind, but will develop your control of your dog, improve your 'teamwork', and most of all, be great fun for you both!



Game On!

## Playing and learning with your Springer.

There are some points to keep in mind when planning playtime

- The amount of play that a dog will enjoy will vary enormously. It will depend on the dog's age, health, and personality, and what activities the dog has already done that day. It will also depend on how interesting you make the game, and what other distractions are available!
- While the intention is to have fun with your dog, make sure that you stick to any basic obedience rules that apply the rest of the time. Always make sure that you, and not the dog, are in control of the game.
- Before you teach a game to a puppy think – would it still be safe and fun with a fully grown dog?
- Always use toys that are specifically designed for dogs. They should not be small enough to swallow, or have small pieces that could come off and be swallowed. Do not let your dog play with or chase sticks, as they can splinter if chewed.
- Keep some specific toys that your Springer only gets to play with you – the fact that they are 'your' toys makes them, and playtime, even more rewarding for your dog.

There are many different types of game that your dog will enjoy. Springers often particularly like games that involve retrieving or searching for objects. There are lots of variations on these games, and you will quickly work out which you and your dog most enjoy and benefit from!

Here are some games that your Springer might enjoy. Most of these are also suitable for less physically active older dogs, who still like to keep their brains in top gear!

### The Small Box Game

Save all your small boxes such as toilet roll tubes, toothpaste boxes, etc. and put a biscuit or two inside them. This is so your dog can rip the box open and earn himself a treat. You can then go on to hide the box and teach your dog a seek command. He then has to hunt to find the box before he gets his reward. This is great for dogs with separation anxiety as you can hide boxes all over the house. Once he starts to look for them, he won't even realise you are gone.

### The Large Box Game

Take a large box (crisp box size - remove any staples or tape). Place one or two smelly treats inside with lots of scrunched up newspaper. Turn the box upside down, tell him 'It's yours' and sit back and watch the fun! You could layer the boxes using different sized boxes, and paper.

### Kong

This is a rubber toy, shaped like an elongated ball which is hollow. You stuff the inside with food, so your dog has to work to get it. Great fun and the dogs seem to love it. If your dog is a little reluctant, add some soft cheese or a small amount of marmite to the inside of the Kong. Other fillings that can be used are: low salt gravy with mashed vegetables, tuna mixed with a small amount of bread and yoghurt. If you freeze your Kong, the fun will last even longer.

### Raggers

These are knotted lengths of strong cotton. Soak in low salt gravy and leave to dry.

### Treat Balls

Another excellent idea, the one shaped like three balls stuck together is excellent as it doesn't roll easily.

### Find the Lady

You will need couple of upturned plant or yoghurt pots. Place a ball or a treat under one of them. Remember he only gets the treat when he guesses correctly.

### Buster Cubes

These are a good activity toy for dispensing their dried kibble, keeps them busy for hours, and even when empty, they can't resist going up to it every so often and giving it a belt,..... 'Just in case'.

### The Laundry Basket Game

Take a plastic laundry basket, one which you can see into. Turn the basket up-side-down, put a ball inside and watch your Springer as he tries to work out how to get it out!

### Lolly

Place some dog biscuits, pieces of carrot, fruit, etc. in a bowl of water or stock and freeze. Once frozen, remove the 'lolly' from the bowl and put in out in the garden. It's messy but good fun and keeps your dog occupied for ages.

