



Tug-A-Treat Puzzle Feeder Instructions

Adapted from instructions submitted for the Hose2Habitat Enrichment Contest 2017.

Winner: Owens Corning Materials Category. Permission for publication and use granted by Susan Bradshaw, Zooville USA.

General Information

The Tug-A-Treat is a puzzle feeder that consists of 4 (or more) “treat cups” inside a larger tube. The treat cups are connected with a threader that has a stopper on each end. The animal pulls on one stopper, allowing only the treat cups on that side to be exposed. The threader is long enough so that when one stopper is pulled, the stopper on the other side only allows the treat cups on one side to come out. The animal can then pull the stopper on the other side to pull the treat cups on that side out while pulling the treat cups on the first side back into the main tube. The size, materials, and number of treat cups can vary and the puzzle feeder can be made to have progressive levels of difficulty.



Safety Concerns

- 🐾 Be sure that the diameter of the tubes and treat cups are of a size that does not allow an animal to get any body part entrapped.
- 🐾 If using PVC or another frangible material, ensure it is strong enough that the animal cannot break it.
- 🐾 Ensure that the item does not become unattached if that would allow ingestion or other harm to the animal.
- 🐾 Ensure that the animal cannot become entangled by the material used as the threader.
- 🐾 Because the tubes and treat cups are of different diameters, ensure that there is a large enough gap between them that an animal cannot get a body part entrapped or pinched between them.
- 🐾 If the animal throws enrichment, be sure to attach the device to a stationary object or otherwise ensure that the animal cannot throw the device and harm objects or living beings.
- 🐾 As always, check with the veterinarians, curators, and superiors to ensure that the device is approved and appropriate for your species and individual animals.



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Items Needed

1 large diameter tube

In these instructions a cardboard tube 4" in diameter and 4' length was used. PVC or other safe tube can be used.

The diameter and length can be varied, adjusting the size of the other materials accordingly.

Containers for treats (treat cups)

In these instructions a cardboard tube 2" in diameter was cut to various lengths was used. PVC or other safe tubes, whiffle balls, or safe materials can be used.

2 stoppers

In these instructions two pieces of scrap wood 2"x4"x12" were used.

Threader (length based on design and length of main tube)

In these instructions sisal rope was used. 1" diameter fire hose, Manilla, nylon, or other approved rope, chain, or material can be used.

Optional

1 medium tube

In these instructions a cardboard tube 3" in diameter and 6' length was used. PVC or other safe tube can be used.

The diameter and length can be varied, adjusting the size of the other materials accordingly.

Instructions

Instructions written using materials as indicated above under "Items Needed". Modify as appropriate for the size and type of materials you are using.

STEP 1. Prepare main tube (and spacer channel if being used).

The 3" diameter tube is cut in half lengthwise. This is used as a "spacer channel" inside of the larger main 4" diameter tube to create some tension to prevent the treat cups from coming out too easily. This is not necessary to make the enrichment work, but makes it more challenging.

The 3" diameter tube is longer than the larger main tube and holes for hanging the device were made in this tube. It was secured to the larger main 4" tube using a nut and bolt at each end. The holes can also be made in the larger tube.





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STEP 2. Add treat cups.

Cut the threader long enough to connect all the treat cups together with enough length remaining to allow the stoppers to hang down about half the length of the large main tube. That way, when one side is pulled, it will allow half of the treat cups to be pulled out, but not the others.

In these instructions, the 2” cardboard tube was cut into various lengths to make the treat “cups”. the device has 2 per side, each 8” long. More shorter sections may be used for more treat cups. Any safe containers of appropriate size may be used. For example, for some smaller species whiffle balls, small containers with lids that need to be unscrewed (both the container and the lid will have a whole in the middle and be attached to the threader), and other interesting containers can add complexity and interest. Containers can be changed to add novelty.

Option 1

With this method the edges of the treat cups that are pulled out first may get “caught” on the side of the large main tube when the treat cups being pulled back into the large main tube from the other side. (This is less likely to happen if round objects like whiffle balls are used as treat cups.) If the treat cups get caught in this way, a keeper may need to assist from outside the enclosure with a rod to put the empty treat cups back in the large main tube to allow the treat cups on the other side to be pulled out. Some animals will be able to figure out how to make the treat cups fit back in even if they get caught on the side of the large main tube when the animal tried to simply pull the empty treat cups back in with the opposite stopper. You may want to start with objects that are rounded and will not get caught, and advance to objects that will get caught on the edges or otherwise be more challenging to place back in the main large tube to allow the treat cups on the other side to be accessed by the animal.



Option 2

On the back side of the 4” tube, drill 2 holes just off center, just large enough to run the threader through. (This example used 2 lengths of sisal each 5’ long.) Long enough to wrap the threader around each treat cup and still be long enough to pull them both completely out of the tube to expose the treats.



STEP 3. Add stoppers.

Drill a hole in the center of each stopper large enough to pass the threader through. Knot one end of the threader to the bottom side of the stopper. This will prevent the treat cups from being pulled all the way out of the large tube and may also be used by the animal to tug the treat cups out. To prevent the wood from sliding on the threader, tie a knot securely against the top of the stopper as well.



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Secure the treat cups to the threader above the stopper. Secure all of the treat cups to the threader and pull them through the tube and then fasten the remaining stopper on the other end of the threader making sure you leave only enough length on the threader to pull half of the treat cups from either side.

