

BARK U Training Guide: Counter-Surfing

Understanding the Behavior

Counter-surfing is a common behavior in dogs and can be rooted in curiosity, instinct, or learned rewards. To address it, start by understanding why your dog is engaging in this behavior:



- **Searching for Food:** Dogs quickly learn that counters often yield tasty rewards.
- **Curiosity and Exploration:** Elevated surfaces offer new vantage points and interesting smells to explore.
- **Seeking Attention:** Even scolding or negative attention can reinforce counter-surfing if your dog is trying to engage with you.

Prevention Is Key!

Managing your dog's environment is the first step to preventing counter-surfing:

- **Eliminate Food Smells:** Keep counters clean and free of food or food scraps to reduce temptation.
- **Ignore Attention-Seeking Behavior:** Avoid scolding or yelling; instead, calmly redirect your dog to a more appropriate activity.
- **Provide Alternatives:** Offer food puzzles, chew toys, or other enrichment activities to occupy your dog.
- **Set Up Boundaries:** Use tools like X-pens or pet gates to block access to the kitchen or dining areas when your dog is unsupervised.

Train an Alternative Behavior

Mat training can be a powerful tool. By teaching your pet to stay on a designated mat, you replace counter-surfing with a positive, incompatible behavior:

1. Mat Training

Teach your dog to go to a designated mat or bed during mealtime or food prep.



- **Designate a Spot:** Choose a mat or bed near the kitchen but away from counters.
- **Reward Staying Put:** Use treats and praise to reward your dog for staying on the mat. Start with short intervals and gradually increase the duration.
- **Stay Consistent:** During meal prep or dining, guide your dog to their spot and reward them for staying calm and out of the kitchen.

2. Automatic “Leave It”

Teaching your dog to automatically leave food or objects alone can help prevent counter-surfing:

Steps:

- **Position Yourself:** Hold a high-value treat behind your back and a lower-value treat in a closed fist at your dog’s nose level.
- **Wait Silently:** Say nothing and don’t move your hand. Breathe and relax—patience is key!
- **Observe Your Dog’s Response:** Your dog may sniff, lick, paw, or bark at your hand. Stay calm and ignore these behaviors.
- **Reward De-Escalation:** When your dog stops engaging (e.g., looks away, sits, or backs off), immediately praise them and reward with the high-value treat from behind your back (not the one in your hand!).
- **Switch Hands:** After a few repetitions, switch hands: extend the high-value treat hand and place the original hand behind your back.
- **Keep Sessions Short:** Use up to 10 treats per session, stopping early if your dog seems stressed or uninterested.

Key Tips for Success

- **Consistency Is Key:** Make sure all household members follow the same rules to prevent confusion.
- **Reward Desired Behaviors:** Reinforce positive alternatives, like staying on the mat or ignoring food, with praise and rewards.
- **Practice Makes Perfect:** Regular training and consistent boundaries will reduce counter-surfing over time.

By managing the environment and teaching positive alternative behaviors, you can curb counter-surfing and enjoy mealtimes without interruptions!

