

Teaching Young Dogs About Poison Birds Without Whips and Chains

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While midway through Double T, start discarding the bumper you just took from your dog parallel with you as opposed to behind you. When the dog eyes it, say **LEAVE IT**. Say **SIT** to get dog's eyes back on the task at hand and continue with the send to the back pile. If saying **SIT** won't get the dog back on the task, you have either started this lesson too early in Double T or you have placed the bumper in too tempting a situation. The point of all this is to introduce the command without penalty.

Gradually you can toss the bumper off to the side and **LEAVE IT** will snap the dog's head back to the task at hand as your next command is **SIT** with a collar nick if the dog doesn't reorient his attention.

Before I leave Double T, I tempt the dog with bumpers thrown off to the side and also at a 45 degree angle off the long line of the Double T. Say ... **LEAVE IT** ... and send to the back pile. If the dog heads for the thrown bumper, the dog gets nicked after a **SIT** whistle, called back and is then resent to back pile.

Occasionally, I will let the dog pick up the "leave it" bumper after he has picked up his Double T bumper. The dog will be cued with **MARK** and sent to it as a mark.

The amount of pressure and the amount of temptation introduced will vary between dogs. The point is not to annihilate the dog but rather to teach him that **LEAVE IT** means, "not this bumper and look for something else to retrieve."

By the time, I leave Double T the dog is very familiar with **LEAVE IT**, whether it is a tossed bumper or a bumper pile walking to and from the line. This is now a familiar command and very specific: "Don't pick up that bumper! And pay attention to your task!"

Notice that NO is not part of the commands.

When starting pattern and cold blinds, don't do any tempting with "**LEAVE IT**" bumpers because, after Double T, there is already enough stress for the dog in learning how to do blinds and in trying to build momentum. However I occasionally use the command when I toss a retrieved bumper behind me. (Don't want dog to forget the command).

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After momentum and understanding of blinds are clicking, I reintroduce the “**LEAVE IT**” bumper in a mildly tempting manner. But now the dog will always pick up the bumper after doing the blind or blinds. If I do 5 blinds then I will do 2 to 4 “**LEAVE IT**” bumpers or birds and gradually get to the point where I can heave the bumper as far as I can throw it...say “**LEAVE IT**” ... and turn to the new blind with very good obedience from the dog.

Now the dog is going to test this command and at some point swerve to the forbidden plastic when sent for the blind. In this case you treat it the same as on the Double T. Whistle SIT, collar nick and **HERE**. Then face bumper ... **LEAVE IT** ... and turn to the intended blind and send.

If dog is going through momentum problems on blinds don't complicate his insecurity with **LEAVE IT**. Wait until dog is running smoothly and then reintroduce **LEAVE IT**.

The big advantage to having taught **LEAVE IT**, is that when you get to thrown poison birds, it will be the bird that the dog will identify with the **LEAVE IT** and not the gunner and the bird. You decrease gunner phobia by having pinpointed the object of the command — the bird — and you have built in the proper response, “**look elsewhere for your bird**”. This method should also build in eagerness to find another object if you have not used too heavy a hand in your corrections.

Teaching poison birds by having a gunner throw the bird and pulling the dog off with a **NO** or a **NO BIRD**, is simple to us humans but not so to the dog. The Dog reads **NO** to the whole setup — bird and gunner — even though we think we are saying **NO** to just the bird. Then when you do the blind behind the gun the dog is in deep trouble. He either wants the bird or he wants to flair the whole situation. This is frustrating to the handler because the correct response looks so easy, but to the dog, the picture is fraught with anxiety. (I do not do poison bird drills with gun stations until the dog's correct response is automatic with my hand thrown “**LEAVE IT**” bumpers).

Why don't I use NO? Probably because I feel that it is too general for poison birds. **NO** says to the dog “don't look at that situation (the poison bird & gunner).” I want the dog to look for something else if he can't have this particular bird. This method teaches the desired response and helps the dog to be stylish and eager on poison bird blinds.