

National Grilling Month kicks off on July 1, and odds are you're making plans to host some cookouts. You know you need to set the guest list and menu, but there's something many dog owners forget: making sure the event is dog-friendly.

Why the focus on Fido? "It's easy for dogs to quickly access food and other items that could be dangerous to them," says Kiko Bracker, D.V.M., director of emergency and critical care at Angell Animal Medical Center in Boston. For instance, Bracker recalls a dog who needed emergency surgery after he ingested enough gravel to fill his stomach. Gravel alone may not be appealing, but drippings from the grill had splashed onto the rocks, tempting the dog. The hospital also receives numerous cases every summer of dogs who consume corn-cob holders and barbecue skewers.

That's why you should first consider your menu. Because skewers pose a threat, Bracker recommends not using them. Be aware, too, that bones and corn-cobs can be life-threatening. "If they're not digested, they can pass through to the small intestines, resulting in small bowel obstruction, which can become fatal without emergency veterinary care," he says. If you do serve these items, place corn-cobs and bones in a garbage can that's out of a dog's reach. Peach pits, foil, plastic wrap, and cotton string used to bind roasts can also cause issues, so keep them away from your dog. If you want to treat your dog to a piece of meat, make sure it doesn't contain bones and isn't so hot that it burns your dog's mouth.

Think, about the grill, as well. Although most dogs are smart enough to avoid an open fire, they can still get into issues with the grill, especially if it falls over and injures them, Bracker says. Their leashes, for example, may get tangled in a grill's legs, knocking it over. Be aware that this could happen and take steps to prevent it, by securing the grill, limiting your dog's access to it, and removing leashes or other items that might become entangled in the grill.

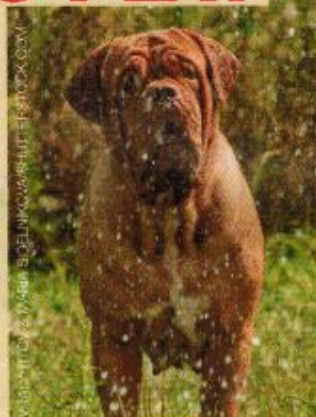
Next, evaluate whether the environment is safe for your dog. Because dogs can't cool down as quickly as people, heat can be problematic. The rule of thumb? "When it's too hot for us, it's too hot for our dogs," Bracker says. If it's safe for your dog to be outside, provide fresh water and shelter in the shade. Otherwise, keep your dog inside and allow access to an air-conditioned room.

And while you probably have already done this, check that poisonous or harmful gardening supplies are out of your dog's reach, including fertilizer, rat poison, and plant food. Put away sharp items, too.

Finally, ask your guests to help keep your dog safe. If your dog is inside your home, remind guests to close doors behind them, and watch that your dog doesn't escape when opening yard gates. If you don't allow your dog to eat table scraps, especially for health reasons, warn your guests not to feed your dog, no matter how adorable she looks. — K.A.

GAMES DOGS PLAY

Your dog might love playing Frisbee and fetching tennis balls, but this summer, introduce her to new games. Why break out of the box? "By giving your dog different tasks, you're forcing him to think more, and mental stimulation is just



as beneficial as physical activity for dogs," says Jaime Van Wye, founder of the Zoom Room, a Los Angeles-based indoor dog training and social club with about 20 locations around the country. Put these three games on your dog's to-do list:

→ **Rock the obstacle course.** You can find obstacles at high school campuses or playgrounds — for instance, your dog might jump up on a bench or hop over a small wall — and you can also create your own at home. For starters, put a few markers such as cones or chairs in a line several feet apart. In another area, place two small pails of equal height 3 or 4 feet apart, and set a broomstick or similar item on top of the pails. Leash your dog, then lead her around the cones or chairs, weaving in and out of them, before encouraging her to jump over the broomstick. Repeat, praising often.

→ **Chase the hose.** If your pooch is obsessed with tennis balls, lure her into chasing water from the hose. The bonus is obvious: "The water will cool off your dog," says Van Wye, adding that she's even taught dogs how to do backflips using the hose.

→ **Track me.** Although this is a beginning training drill to teach dogs how to track, it can also be a fun game. Head to a grassy field, ask your dog to stay, and create a "scent pad" with your feet by stomping a small area. Walk about 20 paces from that scent pad, making well-defined steps by digging your heels into the ground. As you walk, drop a treat in every heel mark. At the end of your track, leave a favorite toy of your dog's or a jackpot reward of numerous treats. Now guide your dog to the first scent pad, and tell her to "Find it" as you point your dog's nose to the food on the scent pad.

Keep guiding and encouraging your dog down the track, making sure she looks for a treat in each foot-step. Just don't let her skip ahead. When your dog reaches the end of the track, let her have the toy or jackpot reward. Continue this game for several weeks, gradually making your track longer, adding turns, and dropping a treat every other step, before tapering the treats altogether. — K.A.