

'On the Ground' Zine

Issue No.14 | November 2025



Photo credit **Manon Kerst - Sensory Garden Happy Dog**

'Why Sensory Experiences for Dogs are so Important.'

by Laura Dobb

Sensory gardens offer dogs a safe and secure environment in which to use all of their senses. Because the garden is free of other dogs and humans, apart from the guardian and garden host, dogs have a unique opportunity to take their time to explore without looking over their shoulder. I first learned about using an enriched

environment for dogs when I took my International Dog Training Education with Turid Rugaas. She set up environments outdoors and indoors with novel items (eg. umbrella), and items with scent value (eg. human glove) so that dogs could explore and interact with things that they might not otherwise encounter. This builds confidence in dogs as they often have to problem solve... *cont'd page three*

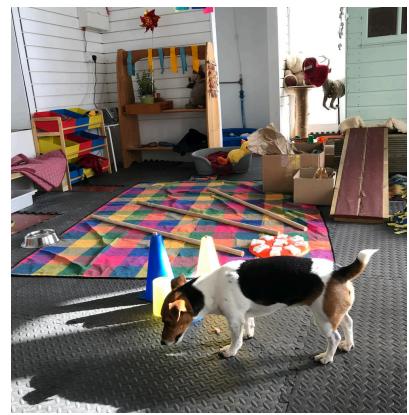


Photo credit **Laura Dobb - Snuffl**

'On the Ground'

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“Be a curator of your life. Slowly cut things out until you’re left only with what you love, with what’s necessary, with what makes you happy.”

”

— Leo Babauta

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...or experience new textures underfoot. One of Turid's students, *Kirsty Grant*, was the first person to open the U.K., and the world's, first indoor enrichment facility for dogs. Her '*The Dog Nose*' business was an inspiration to many of us. Kirsty shared her knowledge for free and then, thankfully, started holding workshops so that others could provide indoor/outdoor enrichment venues for dogs.

The next indoor enrichment facility that opened was in Toronto, Canada. *Helen Moore* added a 'Scent Den' to her business, *Wholesome Canine*. In February 2020, I opened '*Dog Sense*' in the Cornish countryside outside of Penzance, and was open and closed throughout the pandemic. I closed in 2021. On the 1st of April, 2023, I opened '*Snuffl'* in Scarborough, North Yorkshire, an indoor sensory garden for dogs. More about this delightful venue later.

For many years, 'Snuffle Gardens' for dogs have existed in Europe. There was an initiative, started by *Carolin Reger*, called '*Aktion Schnüffelgärten*' and with Carolin's permission, *Birgitta Geerlings-Wensveen* has created an umbrella organisation called '*Sensory Gardens 4 Dogs*' to showcase worldwide sensory dog gardens, educate, and help others create a 'Snuffle Garden Initiative' in their home city or country.

Both Birgitta, and Thirza, who helps with the initiative, have their own outdoor Sensory Dog Gardens, called '*Snuffeltuin Bella*' and '*Sneupen bij Willem*', respectively. They had worked together for many years, promoting sensory dog gardens in The Netherlands. Now, they both invite dogs and their guardians to their individual gardens and donate monies to dog shelters, give workshops, and continue to spread the message of 'sniffing gardens.' Birgitta and Thirza are giving a 'Snuffle Garden Workshop' with still a few dates available. *Please see the poster on the opposite side of this page.*

There are many sensory dog gardens in shelters across the world, and *The Dog's Trust*, *National Animal Welfare Trust*, and the *Bath Cats and Dogs Home*, to name a few, in the UK. offer this secure exploration for their rescue dogs. We will also visit two private gardens, *Sensory Garden Happy Dog* in the NL, and *Hounds Retreat Sensory Garden* in Scotland, on the pages of this ZINE.

When it comes to creating your own sensory dog garden, for pleasure, charity, or business, I can speak from experience about my two indoor gardens here in the UK.



Dog Sense - Tremethick Cross, Penzance, Cornwall

As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, I started an indoor sensory dog garden, or enrichment space in February 2020, just before the pandemic lockdowns in the UK.

I had searched everywhere for a suitable sized, enclosed space, with a toilet, adequate light, parking, and little traffic or noise. It took me about one month, and I found an old 'cart shed' as part of agricultural buildings in a rural part of Cornwall, about a 10 minute drive from my home. The building was owned by Bolitho Estates and the rent was cheap. I had only a couple of visitors before I had to close my doors because of lockdown.

Dog Sense had fixed and moveable items. I had dog friendly herbs in pots, items with high scent value like horse curry combs and blankets, human hats and shoes, dog equipment, and more. I made sure, like Kirsty had taught me, to have a good sight line for the dogs from the entrance (big barn doors) and places for dogs to be out of sight of humans, if only for a minute or two.

I had a seating area with a loveseat for guests and a separate chair for myself. I played songbird CDs for a lovely background noise, and kept the heat off, so the scent would stay low. I sometimes made tea for my clients, and lay *JR Pet Products* treats and chews and pate throughout the space. Some say that food is a distraction, but indoors, I think it helps dogs to relax and feel safe. I had an intake form so that I knew of any allergies in advance of the visit. I also sold *JR Pet Products* at a very low profit.

I think that if the pandemic hadn't happened, *Dog Sense* would have made it. In the end, I was emotionally worn out from opening and closing and trying to get the word out!

'On the Ground'

‘Why Sensory Experiences for Dogs are so Important. ’ by Laura Dobb - con’t



Photo credit **Laura Dobb - Dog Sense**

Snuffl - Indoor Sensory Garden for Dogs, Scarborough, North Yorkshire.

When we moved to Scarborough, I joined a FB group for people wanting stables and fields for their horses. I thought I may be able to find an outdoor space for my sensory garden. I was contacted by a woman who was renting stables and put me in touch with the owner. The suggested area inside a huge barn had a leaking roof and live wires hanging from the ceiling. There was old stuff everywhere as it was a barn that was not in use. I looked all over the property with the owner, and there wasn't anywhere I could possibly rent from her.

I then tried to put a bid on renting a piece of agricultural land within the *Yorkshire Moors National Park*. My bid was not accepted because not many know what dog enrichment is, and I was told it wasn't allowed within the zoning for the land.

I befriended Dianne Murphy in Scarborough Old Town, who owns '*Purple Pup*' - a store dedicated to dog enrichment, chews, and treats. Dianne and her family were so welcoming and they were soon selling our first SLOW DOG MOVEMENT Fan Calendar in their shop.

One day, I noticed that a very large, ground floor space for rent, in a building, at the end of the street near Dianne's shop. I called the number written on the door, and met Dave, the owner within a couple of days. I brought Brett, as he would be helping me renovate the two rooms at street level.

Dave, Brett and I devised an agreement, and *Snuffl* was born! I was excited, but still had months before I could launch. I was working at the Scarborough Hospital, in the uniforms department, to save money to start *Snuffl*. I had also won the support of the local council, who would match my funds. I saved four thousand pounds in four months. Brett and I spent every night after work, and on weekends cleaning and painting the inside of the shop.

I was so lucky to have the support of the council as they had contacts in the media and the week that I launched, I was on *BBC Radio York* and soon after, was in the *Yorkshire Post* newspaper - page three.

Snuffl was open for four months, and had local and tourist clients during its legacy. Unfortunately my premises flooded and I had to close. I learned so much!



Photo credit *Laura Dobb - Snuff*

2026 FAN CALENDAR LAST CHANCE!

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'Why Sensory Experiences for Dogs are so Important.' by Laura Dobb - con't

I *did* do my market research before opened *Snuffl*, but what I didn't know before I opened was that locals would not come to my location during the busy tourist summer. Instead, I was turning away people who thought that *Snuffl* was one more 'activity' for their dog to partake in. I would tell them that their dog was needing a break. I would say, 'go home and put your feet up and have a cup of tea, your dog will thank you!'

How did I get people and their dogs in the door in the first place? I advertised in advance with engaging posts on Facebook, and made my shop give hints of what was to come. When I designed the space, I wanted the design and colours of *Snuffl* to appeal to my human clients as well as be beneficial to dogs. I paid a designer to create a fun logo and graphics for my brand. I stuck to those colours and painted doll houses and even my Wendy House (installed indoors) to match. I had safe plants and herbs indoors, a welcoming flag flying outside, and beautiful window films with my graphics to give dogs privacy and people outside, curiosity.

I had 'fixtures' that stayed in place, like my Wendy House, ramps, and furniture, but 'elements' that were moveable, like plant pots, mats, broom sticks, stuffed toys etc. I did ask people to complete a questionnaire before hand and tried to have a conversation prior to having dogs and humans enter the space. I was lucky to have two rooms - a reception area with a small shop. I sold *Haqihana* harnesses and *Snuffl* and SLOW DOG MOVEMENT t-shirts and Fan Calendars.

Besides the beautiful design of *Snuffl* and friendly atmosphere, I told people that sensory gardens and enriched environments provide a safe, enclosed sensory experience for dogs of all ages, mobility and life history. That *Snuffl*, as an indoor garden, is built to engage their dog's brain, improve balance and proprioception and increase problem solving abilities. It's not only healthy and fun for their dog but helps form a stronger bond between you and your best friend. And I explained further...

Sensory gardens, whether in your own home or garden, provide an enclosed space for dogs to move at their own pace. Exploring their very own enriched environment, takes any worry your dog may have about other dogs approaching them. They can relax completely in their own space.

As you observe your dog from your comfy chair, sofa, or outdoor bench, you will learn what their preferences are. Your dog will choose to climb onto a ramp, a log or an unusual texture in the enrichment space.

They may stop and sniff the air or lie down. They will explore in their own way with your passive support. You don't need to provide verbal support or commands. They will learn to problem solve on their own. This experience will strengthen your relationship with your dog.

Dogs benefit in many ways from sniffing in freedom. Inhaling scent is the most basic of dog natural behaviours. Their nose is their world! They grow new neural pathways and their body releases calming hormones. When checking out a new environment, dogs use all their senses. Their nose, eyes, ears, sense of touch/skin, vestibular (balance), and taste.

These simple acts of understanding and kindness towards our dogs are priceless. Dogs and their guardians go home with more information about their dog and dogs are relaxed and 'brain tired' with a sense that they are closer to their human.

Laura Dobb, Founder/Director
SLOW DOG MOVEMENT© C.I.C.



Snuffl dogs do this after a visit!

Snuffl
Sensory Dog Garden

"Dogs are masters of creating emotionally safe space just by being themselves... it is as if something deep within our souls resonates with their energy, their unwavering unconditional love and unbridled joy to be in our presence, their undivided loyalty, and complete trust in us. Dogs make us feel special, and teach us by example to relish simple pleasures and live totally in the moment. They teach us there is only now and only who you are, who you are with, and what you are doing right then – and what could be better than to sniff the wind and be in the company of those you love?"

— Val Silver, author of 'Rescue Me: Tales of Rescuing the Dogs Who Became Our Teachers, Healers, and Always Faithful Friends'

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'Why Sensory Experiences for Dogs are so Important.' by Laura Dobb - con't



'On the Ground'

'What is a 'hundeglückimschuhkarton' event? by *Laura Dobb*



photo credit Sonja Hoegen

When I was doing my International Dog Training Education (IDTE) with Turid Rugaas, in Germany in 2014/2015, I was lucky enough to have Sonja Hoegen as my host. Sonja started her dog training school, 'Dogcom,' in 2005, in Bad Wimpfen, Germany, as a young woman with a passion for dogs and entrepreneurial vigour.

For twenty years she has given back to her community by organising a yearly 'hundeglückimschuhkarton' event, which translates to 'dog happiness in a shoebox,' for Christmas and for the rescue dogs of the Heilbronn e.V. animal shelter.

What a beautiful idea, to ask volunteers, often her students, to put together shoeboxes full of wrapped treats and toys. The volunteers bring the boxes to the rescue centre and watch the dogs open and discover their treats inside.

Just as the idea of creating sensory gardens for dogs in shelters is a powerful tool for enrichment and relaxation for dogs who are waiting for a home, these 'hundeglückimschuhkarton' also provide a special event for needy dogs. The shoeboxes give dogs a chance to scavenge, rip, sniff, and chew - all natural dog behaviours.

Laura Dobb

Founder/Director
SLOW DOG MOVEMENT© C.I.C.



photo credit Sonja Hoegen

'On the Ground'

'Happy Dog Sniffing Garden" by Manon Kerste

'I saw your question for pictures of sensory gardens and thought I could share some of my sensory garden.'

What I found interesting is that most dogs seems to prefer sniffing and exploring the natural things like plants and woods or wool feathers or other animal material.

Often I also put in some not so natural things like plastic but its merely not so interesting (unless in summer I put in water and toys in a big bucket or plastic pool:)

Greetings from 'Happy Dog Sensory Garden!'

Manon Kerste

Happy Dog Coach
Gedragsbegeleiding & Speuren
www.happydogcoach.nl

"If you abandon the present moment, you cannot live the moments of your daily life deeply"

— Thich Nhat Hanh



photo credits **Manon Kerste**



'On the Ground'

'Hounds Retreat Sensory Garden' by Yolanda Banuls

photo credit **Yolanda Banuls**



At *Hounds Retreat*, our sensory garden is a place where dogs can slow down, explore at their own pace, and reconnect with the world—and themselves—through their senses.

The garden sits within our paddock and features two circular spaces designed to naturally encourage mindful movement. There's a mix of textures—bark, stepping stones, and grass—along with logs and a variety of plants, including lavender, rosemary, and heather. Many of the plants are in pots, allowing us to move them easily, introduce new scents, or refresh the space with the seasons.

The garden is versatile, too. We use it for treat hunts and enrichment activities—our favourite is placing snuffle mats on logs to provide gentle, low-impact enrichment for senior dogs. Seasonal changes, like adding new herbs, plants, or even vegetables, keep the space engaging and ever-changing.

Join our email list: slowdogmovement.org



photo credit **Yolanda Banuls**

'On the Ground'

'Hounds Retreat Sensory Garden' by **Yolanda Banuls** *Continued*

What makes the garden truly special is what we learn from the dogs as they explore. Their movements and reactions show us what they enjoy, what they avoid, and what stimulates their senses most. This insight helps us tailor enrichment to support each dog's unique needs and personality.

It's a joy to watch dogs relax, focus, and decompress in the garden. Equally rewarding is seeing their guardians witness this—watching their dogs explore freely, reveal their personalities, and engage naturally. For nervous or senior dogs, it's a gentle way for dogs and guardians to reconnect.

Hounds Retreat was inspired by my own rescue dogs, who taught me the importance of creating a safe, supportive space. The sensory garden has become a big part of that—a space where dogs can simply be dogs, and where we can learn from them.

Yolanda Banuls

Owner

Hounds Retreat (houndsretreat.com)
Thornton, Scotland

photo credit **Yolanda Banuls**

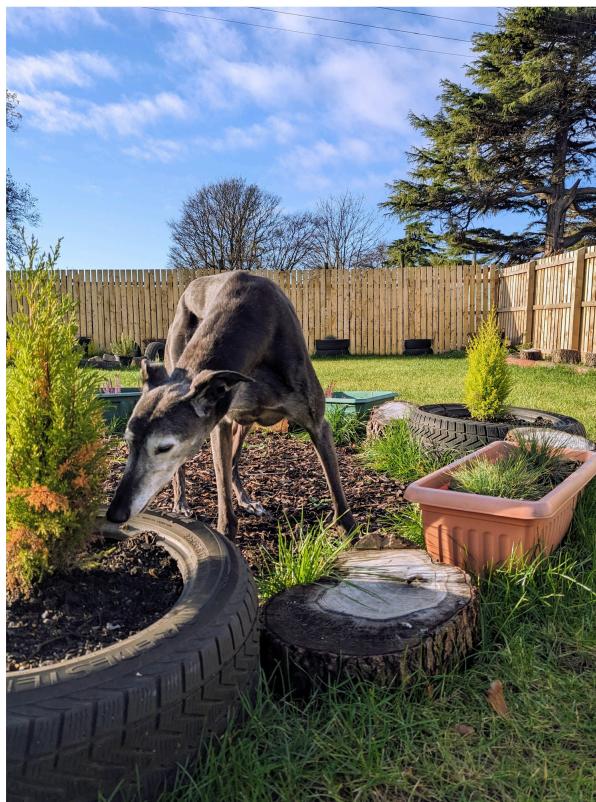


photo credit **Yolanda Banuls**

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Slow Dog Movement Philosophy written by Santos Salcines Nazabal and Laura Dobb

The #slowdogmovement aims to foster deeper relationships between dogs and humans, educate by 'showing the right way' and grow a like minded worldwide community of dog lovers embracing the value of SLOW.'

The **Slow Dog Movement© C.I.C.** is a social movement. We promote ethical values within the dog/human relationship. In keeping with the human ecosystem, we cultivate our respectful coexistence. We consider the deep knowledge of the physiology and needs of the dog.

The **Slow Dog Movement© C.I.C.** is not a forum to find "quick solutions" or "how-tos." Or to deal with a specific problem without knowing the dog, the family, and the environment in situ. For this reason, it is risky for us to answer these queries. They need a complete review by a friendly canine education professional. On many occasions, they should also include a multidisciplinary holistic approach.

The **Slow Dog Movement© C.I.C.** promotes self-knowledge and emotional development. Members can learn through 'master scenarios.' These are where each dog can display the entire repertoire of known natural behaviours. Due to lack of experience, some dogs do not even know these yet.

Dogs and humans often find slowing down complicated. Dogs may have the feeling that they need to protect themselves. How can they be aware when they don't know that they can feel otherwise?

Many dogs do not know that going outside can be slow. They do not know that they can go for a walk without pulling on the leash. Without barking. Without a concerned human accompanying them during the walk.

The **Slow Dog Movement© C.I.C.** promotes and shares values such as these hashtags:

#donothingwithyourdog©
#circleoftrust
#beyourdogsbestfriend
#forestbathingwithyourdog
#inpraiseofslow
#slowwalks

And other 'non-hashtag' ideas!

We also support initiatives like
<https://www.sensorygarden4dogs.com/>, a worldwide project.

What we suggest as guidelines within our philosophy:

- The relationship with our dog is the primary focus.
- It's a dog's choice - choice to walk, speed, play, meeting other dogs, humans, chews, sleep, contact etc. Choice builds confidence and is a dog's right.
- Slow enables observation. It's important to observe a dog and what they are communicating.
- Humans must slow down so that their dogs can do the same.
- Studying the 'dog ethogram' and support of natural dog behaviours.
- The 90% calm, 10% aroused ratio is a suggested aim.
- Focus on movement and activity that supports a healthy body and brain.
- Respect for our dogs as sentient beings and individuals.
- Appropriate equipment - well fitted harness and long, loose leash, minimum 3m.
- Ask yourself why it's important to you to engage in training/commands, whether it be 'positive' or 'fear free.'
- In terms of dogs and sports/hobbies, ask yourself, would your dog engage in these activities if left to their own desires?
- Always fulfil the basic needs of your dog and remember to check their emotional requirements as well.
- Slow walks and other recommended activities on our page can really help rescue dogs and dogs with fear and anxiety.
- Take your time to get to know your dog and support their individual character and needs.

How to find us at the Slow Dog Movement©C.I.C.

<http://www.slowdogmovement.org>

laura@slowdogmovement.org

FB, IG & Twitter:

[@slowdogmovement](https://twitter.com/slowdogmovement)

[@slowdogmovement](https://www.instagram.com/slowdogmovement)

[@donothingwithyourdog](https://www.facebook.com/donotworryaboutyourdog)

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'On the Ground'

Photo credit: [Kirsty Falk](#)

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*When we rush, we skim the surface,
and fail to make real connections with
the world or other people*

— Carl Honoré, *In Praise of Slow:
Challenging the Cult of Speed*

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