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# Cuisine *de* Critters

There's Comfort Food...  
And Then There's Comfort Food!

By Phil Tripp

*Swordfish, marlin and tuna have wonderfully large spinal bones that are perfect for dogs and yield natural nutrients such as glucosamine and chondroitin.*

There seems to be a time, about 4:30 in the afternoon, when the office dogs go feral. It's been a while since breakfast. We try to limit them to a few healthy treats during the day, knowing that a dog can devour a pig's ear in minutes. They get boisterous, play with each other and then get into mischief.

Once the end of the afternoon nears, our puppy starts shredding boxes or the occasional book that's been left out, gets into the recycling bin, or even worse, undoes the top of the garbage bin and finds food scraps. He's even taken the birdcage paper lining and pulled it from between slats to devour the food scraps on it and shred what's left happily throughout the room.

The trick we had to learn was giving them occupational therapy in the office, which involved them creatively using 'tools' to work at, with rewards. You don't just use treat-loading as a way to distract them, they'll only want more. It used to be that giving the pup a plastic juice or soda bottle after taking off the wrapper was an hour's worth of crunching, but now he's finished with the game when he gets the top off.

I used to put treats inside the bottle, which distracted them for a while, but they soon learned how to shake the bottle and empty it. I swear they were able to sit up and do this, but maybe I was dreaming. Taking a 1.5-litre plastic cranberry juice bottle, stomping on it to flatten it and then stuffing some treats in its folds made for a loud time, but they soon were bored.

While the rubber Kong stuffable toys - Canine Genius, Boredom Buster, Denta Ridge and others of their ilk - offer hours of interactive play as they are packed with peanut butter, liverwurst and meaty treats, they can get pretty rank and have to be cleaned often to keep the dog from getting poisoned. I'm always hesitant putting them in the dishwasher.

But recently I've discovered some ways to turn ordinary food into attention distracters that are not fatty or highly caloric. One of them, oddly enough, was some large zucchinis I was given by a neighbour. Though my wife said they'd never eat them, sure enough they loved thick slices raw. Carrots have turned into treats too.

While bones can keep them busy, I've found that frozen and icy turkey necks can keep them working away without the mess of fat, blood and gristle on the floor from marrow or brisket, especially when they tend to come inside with their treasures as the days get colder.

Another treat that I use a lot is chicken frames, which we buy in bulk from the Lenards chain of chicken shops, usually found in malls. At Broadway Centre, we love the fact that Lenards has whole bags of chicken frames and also minced chicken frames for about \$2.50 a kilo in addition to chicken necks and chicken wing tips.

I've mentioned before that we use whole smaller fish ungutted and with heads on. The soft bones won't hurt the dog, it's just a matter of matching the size of the dog to the size of the fish. At the Fish Market, one vendor often has small fish with their heads and frames at \$2 a kilo. Dogs love fish heads, especially salmon, and they are kept busy gnawing the gills and popping the eyeballs.

But one trick I learned was that the big fish on display being cut up - swordfish, marlin, tuna and other big pelagics - have wonderfully large spinal bones that are perfect for dogs and yield natural nutrients such as glucosamine and chondroitin. Get your fishmonger to chop off a chunk of spine where they've cut away the steaks and it will still have some fish flesh on it too.

But enough of the gruesome raw stuff. Let's think ahead to the cooler months when comfort food means Mutt Meat Loaf (our recipe in a previous issue).

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## Fido's Feast

For a 10 to 20-kilo dog; adjust for yours

- 1 teaspoon olive oil
- 1/2 cup mashed potatoes
- 1 egg
- 1/2 cup diced cooked turkey meat
- 1/2 cup chopped broccoli
- 1/2 cup grated cheddar or other cheese

Warm the olive oil in a medium-sized pan over medium heat.

Whisk together potatoes and egg in a small bowl.

Pour potato and egg mix into the pan. Add the turkey and broccoli.

Cover pan, reduce heat to low and simmer until the egg is cooked.

Top with grated cheese and let it cook a few minutes longer until cheese melts. Let cool before serving.

## Mutty Meatballs

Good enough to share with humans

- 1/2 kilo ground beef
- 2/3 cup grated cheddar cheese
- 1 carrot, finely chopped or grated
- 1 cup breadcrumbs
- 2 eggs, whisked
- 3 tablespoons tomato paste

Preheat the oven to 180 degrees.

Combine all ingredients in a medium-size bowl.

Scoop out by the heaping spoonful and roll into mini-size meatballs. (Hint, use oiled disposable rubber gloves).

Place meatballs on a cookie sheet sprayed with non-fat cooking spray.

Bake for 15 to 20 minutes.

Cool and store in the refrigerator in a container with a lid.

## Poochie's Pancakes

Filling:

- 2 cups ricotta or cottage cheese
- 2 eggs
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1 pinch of salt

Pancakes:

- 1 and 1/2 cups flour
- 4 eggs
- 2 cups milk
- Butter for frying
- 4 tablespoons non-salted butter, melted
- 1 teaspoon salt

Waxed paper or baking paper

Make filling by placing cheese, eggs, flour, and salt into a mixing bowl and beat until blended. Set mixture aside and prepare the pancakes.

Make pancake batter by placing, flour, eggs, milk, butter and salt into a blender (or food processor) and mix until batter is smooth.

Heat a frying pan over medium heat, adding a knob of butter. Pour in a small amount of batter and tilt the pan so that the batter covers the bottom of the pan. Cook until pancakes are golden brown and the top shows little bubbles. Put the pancake, cooked side down, on some baking paper.

Continue making pancakes until all the batter is used, layering them between sheets of kitchen paper until ready to be filled.

To fill the pancakes, turn cooked side up. Add a heaping tablespoon of filling onto the lower third of each pancake and roll up.

Place butter in a pan over medium heat, add pancakes and brown on all sides.

*Turn ordinary food into attention distracters that are not fatty or highly caloric. One of them, oddly enough, was some large zucchinis.*

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## Tabby's Turkey

Good for four servings

- 1 teaspoon iodised salt
- 2 teaspoons oil
- 1 and 1/2 cups water
- 1/2 cup uncooked rice
- 250 grams turkey giblets (or chicken giblets, chopped into kitty bite-size pieces)
- 1/4 cup finely chopped carrot
- 1/2 cup chopped spinach

Add salt and oil to the water and bring to boil. Pour rice into boiling water, lower heat, cover, and cook for 10 minutes. Stir in the giblets, carrot, and spinach. Cover and simmer over low heat for another 10 minutes. Cool and serve.

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