

# New dog tricks

At three years old, Nyx is learning to play fetch. It isn't something we taught her, exactly; she just figured out that if she dropped a toy in a lap it was more likely to get thrown than if she tried to get us to play with her and take the toy. The funniest thing about this development, though, is that since she was a puppy she has played fetch with herself. She'll pick up a toy, shake it and run around with it, and then she flings it as hard as she can. As soon as she lets go, she's chasing it. I have no idea where she learned that particular habit, but it amuses me no end. I don't know why or when she decided that her version of solitary fetch just wasn't enough anymore.

She also spent a lot of time emulating the cats while she was little, so she shares some habits with them. If I hold out my hand, my cat will walk under it and keep turning so I'm petting her without doing anything. She's done that since we got her, and it's something I've seen with other cats, too. Nyx picked up on that, and she's tall enough that if I just hold my hand out at my side, parallel to the floor, Nyx will walk under it and then turn in circles so I'm petting her.

None of this has to do with the animals not getting enough attention. Most evenings my cat curls up either on my lap or behind my head, and Nyx gets attention pretty much constantly. When we're settled in the evening, reading or watching television, she has her head on one lap and, often as not, her back end on another lap. She thinks she is a lap dog, but at 120 pounds she's a little too big to manage it comfortably. We joke about who gets the head end, since the other end is sometimes not as pleasant.

We've been doing some clicker training with Nyx, and it's really interesting to watch her try to figure out what we want. One of the fun things for me is to decide what I want

her to do and then click the behaviour. I'm not luring her or trying to teach her, just catching what she does and seeing if she'll do what I want. It's a game, and she seems as amused by it as I am. When the clicker comes out, she's at attention. That probably has a lot to do with the fact that clicker=treats, but as long as we're both having fun, that's fine with me. Clicker training has been much more interesting than even basic treat-based training because I'm asking Nyx to use her brain, to figure things out, and she likes that. I really enjoy watching her figure out the pieces and work her way through things.

I like having animals around for the most part. Sometimes they drive me batty, but I like the companionship. On cold nights, the warmth is nice, too.

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## Idiot cat

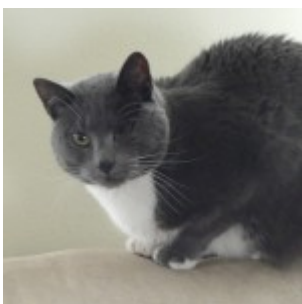
We have two cats. We got them the same day, but one is about nine months older than the other. The one we got as a very small kitten, Loki, is Xander's cat. He picked her up upside down, held her in weird positions, and she grew up with my last dog, Ace, a Rottweiler. She thinks she's a dog. There is a very distinct difference between her tail lashing when she is upset and her tail wagging when she's happy.

Just think about that for a minute. Have you ever seen a cat wagging its tail?



Loki deals with Nyx pretty well. She messes with her on a regular basis. Loki will lie down on her side on a chair and make mewping noises until Nyx comes over to investigate. Nyx's head is about the size of the cat. Nyx nudges Loki. Loki smacks Nyx across the face with no claws. Nyx thinks about wandering off, and Loki calls her back. This continues until Nyx nudges a little too hard, at which point just the tips of Loki's claws come out and Nyx backs off. Loki is definitely in charge.

Eris is my cat. When we got her she had already been through three homes. One, her original foster home, was a good home. The next place adopted her and decided that she had too much energy for their older cat. I'm not sure what they expected, since they got a kitten, but people are sometimes odd. Instead of taking her back and saying it was not a good match, they gave her a room all to herself. Maybe they thought they were being nice. I don't know. In any case, shutting a kitten up in a room is a bad idea. She decided to dig out under the door. The floor was carpeted, and she started ripping it up. Unfortunately, the people who had her had sprayed that carpet for ants. Eris got very sick and eventually went back to the first home.



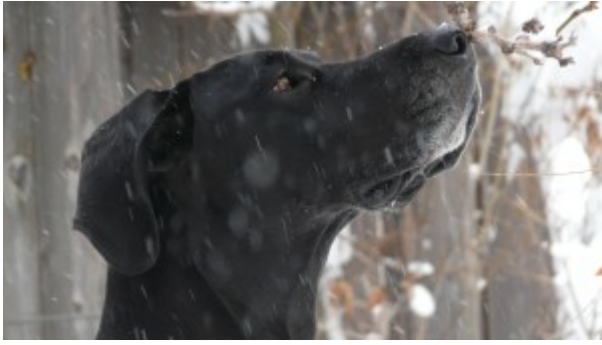
When she was about four months old, she got an infection and the vet had to remove one of her eyes. As you might imagine, this did not endear her to potential adopters.

The third home was not awful, but Eris was still not very good at navigating with only one eye. She fell off of a bookcase and hit a table and the socket bled, so the owners freaked out and sent her, once again, to the foster home.

Xander and I were looking for cats who were at least part Russian Blue. He really likes the breed and I didn't have much opinion. Eris' mother was a full Russian Blue, and I asked if we could adopt her, but by the time I came across her she had been adopted. The foster home asked if we might be interested in her daughter and sent pictures. I thought she was beautiful, and we adopted her.

Eris is gorgeous. Sleek, small, and delicate, at least when she's not being clumsy. She is not, however, the brightest cat I have ever met. She gets stuck in cupboards, hasn't figured out how to boss the dog around, and, if she's really irritated, she pees on things. Apparently she doesn't like papasan chairs. No idea why, but she made that quite clear. Pungently. She also pees on the dog's bed, given the chance.

Nyx periodically takes cushions off of the couch. We put planks on the cushions if she's doing it too often, since a while ago she pulled off the cushions and dug a small hole in the inside of the couch. A few days ago she pulled a cushion off just as I was getting ready to leave. I put it back on, put the planks over the cushions, and headed out. A few hours later, Xander mentioned that my cat was an idiot. In the time that it took me to get the cushion and put it back on the couch, my cat dove through the hole and stayed there until Xander sat down. He heard her meowing (we call her the crabby cat because she had some damage to her vocal cords, too, so her voice is scratchy) and, after opening every cupboard in the house (she gets stuck in those pretty often, too), he finally found her under the couch. He had to widen the hole in the couch for her to get out again because she couldn't figure it out.



The combination of a dog who is still a little bit of a puppy, a cat who is rather short on brains, and another cat who seems to take perverse joy in bothering the other two (about five minutes after Loki met Eris

she started jumping her from her blind side), we are never short of entertainment or irritation, depending on our moods that day.

My cat is not very smart, but she is a sweet cat and, despite being terrified of Nyx, she comes and sleeps on my lap. I can live with that.