

What is Nosework?

Nosework is a fun and fast growing sport where dogs search for essential oil scent similar to drug or bomb detection dogs. We base many of our training methods from real life detection training. The most amazing thing about this sport is how confident dogs become after learning and doing nosework! I attribute this to their natural ability to smell which is intrinsically motivating. It's a sport for ALL dogs and super ideal for dogs needing more confidence, injured dogs, senior dogs, young dogs with energy that need a job, etc.

There are a few different Nosework organizations and more developing or moving into new areas. This class is based on NACSW but most of the factors are the same/comparable with the other organizations (UKC, SDDA).

Before you can enter a trial, you must attend an ORT (Odor Recognition Test) to certify that your dog can search and indicate the corresponding titling odor.

- Birch is used for the first level titling class – NW1. You must pass your Birch ORT before trialing.
- Anise and Birch are used for NW2. You must pass your Anise ORT and have your NW1 title before trialing in NW2.
- Clove, Anise, and Birch are used for NW3. You must pass your Clove ORT and have your NW2 title before trialing in NW3

We call these scents or odors the “source” that they are learning to search. Each titling class involves 4 elements – **containers**, **interior**, **exterior** and **vehicles** searches. There are also Element trials where you can title in one element, for example, in Containers.

You should read and familiarize yourself with the rules of your organization.

Method Used

The method we will be using to find odor will be through the use of shaping (Operant Conditioning) and back chaining. The dog “finds” the odor by accident using a game called “It’s your choice”. The dog is rewarded at source and then continues to offer that behavior for reinforcement. We will use back chaining where we start with indicating/staying at source first before we do any searching/hunting for scent.

The traditional method teaches the dog to hunt for food first (for an extended period of time) and then the scent is paired with food, and then the food is removed. The fundamental issue with this method is that eventually food is used as a DISTRACTION and causes unnecessary confusion for the dog later on.

We are not interested in teaching the dog to search for food. We want the dog to understand the value of odor, and to stay at source regardless of distractions (food, etc). The dog learns quickly that reinforcement happens when staying at source, which builds drive to search/hunt for odor!

The one advantage of the traditional “search for food” method is that the handler requires little or no training skill for several months. Using our method, we will assume a basic level of comfort with shaping a very simple behavior.