

TALES FROM THE BARK SIDE

Winter 2007

The official Au Purr LLC newsletter

Yadda Yadda Yadda

Sit down. (*um, sit, or down?*)

No. (*this one means don't chew the hand-tied imported rug fringe*)

Down. (*Lie down here at my feet like a Norman Rockwell dog*)

Sit.

Sit down.

Lie. (*OK...Of course I'll call you. I had a great time.*)

Lie down.

Down. (*get off the couch*)

Off. (*again, get off the couch*)

Get off. (*and still, get off the couch*)

Get down. (*don't jump on the person coming in the door*)

Stop. (*still, stop jumping*)

Bad Dog. (*The person at the door is now asking for insurance information*)

No. (*just a general statement of displeasure at about 15 different concurrent behaviors*)

Get off sit stay no no no. (*stop jumping on the person, stop barking, sit down even though you are really excited and can't truly hear me right now, and then stay there while I walk away with this visitor and forget you need to be released from that stay, and hey stop ignoring me!!!*).

Believe it or not, this is a pretty typical few hours of what a dog hears from us, along with a whole bunch of other drivel thrown in between. Now if that isn't bad enough, picture hearing this in Chinese, or Ukrainian, or Urdu. Could you even tell where one word ended and another began?

Also in this issue:

Overnight visits are here...

Kale is Junk Food? Watch out bunnies!

Customer Appreciation Month and Free Visits for YOU!

Au Purr's favorite sites

Kim and Chester: Good together



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Yadda Yadda Yadda Continued

Enough to recognize distinct word commands, especially ones that altered subtly?

Car carpet pet
Three entirely different things, right?
Sit sit down down
Three entirely different things, right?
Oh, wait...!!!!

So why do we expect dogs to understand our messy language? Most native English speakers couldn't diagram a sentence, and yet we expect our canine companions to have a grasp of word order and cadence.

Cut down on everyone's frustration. Come up with a doggie dictionary, for every single member of the house to use, and BE CONSISTENT.

Some suggestions: eliminate the word "down" completely. It is too often misused and abused. If you speak a second language, consider using words from that language. This may help (in your own brain) remind you to stick to the dictionary, and will also prevent other humans from fouling things up. Write out the words and the corresponding action they are meant to elicit, and hand this out to all household members. Insist on keeping to the list!

One more thing...**sitsitsit** is not the same thing as **sit**. Give your word one time, then if necessary use physical guidance to bring about the requested behavior, followed immediately by praise/reward. No ten second lag in any part of this.

We vocalize a lot, humans do, and not very efficiently. Is it any wonder that sometimes dogs, who speak only when they feel it is necessary to get attention (but rely far more on stance, eye contact, ear position, etc to communicate) stop listening to us? Give them a fair chance by vocalizing in a manner that will provide consistent information to our furry friends.

Kale is junk food? No way...

by guest contributor Kelly Ogradnik

"Hurry up! I hear that plastic bag rustling and I knooooow something good is going to be coming out of there! Hurry UP and pull that kale outta the bag before I bite your pant leg off!...No, wait...do I see parsley?! Thats my favorite! Oh nooooo. Fooled again. Its romaine lettuce. Great. This stuff is so boring. You expect me to eat *that*? (nibble, nibble) Yup, bland, just as I remembered."

Chances are, this is the dialogue that runs through the mind of your rabbit each day when he/she is begging at the refrigerator door for fresh greens. Of course, for most of us, we would like to feed our rabbits what they like best, which includes lots of kale and parsley. Humans are not the only junk food addicts...cats have their tuna, and rabbits have kale and other high-calcium greens. Maybe yummy, but not so good for their health.



Caught with the evidence...
Kelly's bunny Snowball

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Favorite Sites: Cute Overload

I'm NOT a gushy cutsie girly type, and I never did that chirpy "awwww" thing or thought kitten calendars were a good idea.

But this site IS CUTE! Not only dog and cat pics, but bunnies and ferrets and lizards...oh my. With pretty funny accompanying text, lots of contests, ways to send pics to friends, etc.

Some day when you need a sugar fix, look here instead. I won't tell anyone.

<http://www.cuteoverload.com>

As requested... overnight visits!

We now offer limited overnight visits. Dates are subject to Kim's availability - Nina still does no overnights.

Rates are as follows:
Sunday - Thursday nights, with visit to last from 6 pm until the following 8 am, \$50 per night.

Friday or Saturday nights, with visit to last from 6 pm until following 10 am, \$65 per night.

Entire weekend, from Friday at 6 until Sunday noon, with constant presence except for no more than two hours (for errands, groceries, etc), \$150 per weekend.

Bunny junkies con't

Rabbits should be fed at least 1 cup of fresh greens daily per 4 lbs. of body weight. A variety of three different types of fresh vegetables and greens everyday is necessary to maintain a healthy, balanced diet. Certain greens, such as kale and parsley, have excessive amounts of calcium which can pose serious health risks for your rabbit. Two ounces of commercial rabbit pellets provide more than enough calcium for the average rabbit; therefore, most vegetables further raise calcium level intake. Vegetables have varying amounts of calcium levels, and those with high levels of calcium should be given less often, or as a treat.

What about the hay and pellets you are feeding your rabbit? Alfalfa hay is extremely high in calcium and should be restricted to young, growing rabbits. Alfalfa should be eliminated from the diet of an adult rabbit, and should be replaced with unlimited amounts of lower calcium hays such as timothy or oat. Just as alfalfa hay should be eliminated from your adult rabbit's diet, so should alfalfa-based pellets. A timothy-based pellet such as Oxbow's Bunny Basics T will provide appropriate fiber and calcium levels for your rabbit.

So, all this talk about high calcium levels...what does it all mean? And why does it matter? Rabbits excrete excess calcium through their urinary tract, and higher than normal levels of calcium puts them at risk of developing stones in their kidneys, ureters, bladder or urethra. The kidneys or bladder may also develop a thick calcium "sludge," made up of crystallized calcium. "Sludge" excreted in the urine will appear unusually thicker than normal urine. Signs of stones or "sludge" include one or a combination of the following: less frequent urination, straining to urinate, urinating next to the litter box, blood in the urine, urine scald on the rabbit's underside, lack of appetite or energy, and/or thick urine.

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Kim's Shadow and her Sun

During a recent afternoon outing at the park, someone commented that my dog and I make a good pair. At that particular moment, Chester was standing in front of me with his eyes fixated on the end of the Chuck-it in my hand, his legs trembling in anticipation. Although almost eight years old, his ears and feet still appear to be three sizes too big for him. His impossibly long tongue hung out the side of his mouth and his sides heaved with the exertion of an hour-long pursuit of his beloved b-a-l-l. Strips of (his own) slobber were strung over his nose and one ran down the length of his side. I stared at the guy with feigned alarm at the comparison. But when Chester let out an exasperated bark, I launched the tennis ball and nodded in agreement as I proudly watched him race across the field.

After what sometimes feels like a lifetime together, Chester and I have become a "we". Even I find this slightly disturbing, especially in company that does not include pet owners. Yet repeatedly I hear the words coming out of my mouth: we moved to Pittsburgh not long ago;

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Bunny junkies con't

Unlimited fresh water and timothy hay, as well as a daily diet consisting of a variety of vegetables and a limited amount of timothy hay-based pellets, is likely to keep your rabbit happy, healthy and free of bladder stones and "sludge." Adequate water consumption is necessary to lessen the calcium concentration in the urine. Keep in mind that fresh greens are made up of 95% water, which balances out the concentration of calcium levels they provide. While fruits are usually listed as low calcium providers, they are very high in sugar, and should be used only as a treat, and limited fruits to 1-2 tbsp. daily per 5 lbs. body weight.

Many vegetables that are appropriate for your rabbit are listed below. Feed a variety of at least three of the following vegetables daily, keeping the high calcium veggies (!) to a minimum.

Basil, Beet greens (tops), Bok choy, Broccoli (mostly leaves/stems), Brussels sprouts, Carrot & carrot tops, Celery, Cilantro, Clover, Collard greens, Dandelion greens and flowers (no pesticides), Endive, Escarole, Green peppers, Kale (!), Mint (!), Mustard greens, Parsley (!), Pea pods (the flat edible kind), Peppermint leaves, Radicchio, Radish tops, Raspberry leaves, Red Leaf lettuce, Romaine lettuce (no iceberg or light colored leaf), Spring greens (!), Spinach (!), Watercress (!), Wheat grass

Keep in mind that the key to staying healthy is moderation and variety. Your bunny is sure to thank you with many years of love and fun.

For more information on rabbit diets and calcium levels, visit:

<http://www.rabbit.org>
(The House Rabbit Society)

<http://www.carrotcafe.com>

<http://www.rabbitwelfare.co.uk/rwf/articles/calcium.htm>

Kim's Shadow and her Sun con't

we hope to go to veterinary school; we love this trail; we have a cat named Pink (that one requires a qualifier - I love my cat as much as my dog but, well, there is a but...). Chester has been with me since the end of college through grad school, during the ups and downs of relationships and for multiple cross-country moves. Years ago he transitioned from a rambunctious puppy to my dearest friend and constant companion. In his role as confidante, he sits facing me with his head cocked and ears slightly turned back. When I finish my monologue, he raises a paw to rest on my knee. Then after the briefest pause, he winks at me.

As I sit here with my laptop and Pink purring on my lap, Chester joins us on the couch. Technically, he's not allowed up here but we reached a compromise long ago: he swings just his bum onto the cushion and crosses his hind legs, leaving his front feet on the floor. He angles himself towards me as if we are two guests chatting at a cocktail party. When I see our reflection in the blank TV screen, I wonder if the stranger at the park was referring to our close bond, a shared enthusiasm for playing fetch or maybe just our oft-noted resemblance - I never grew into my ears either.

The thing is, it just doesn't matter what motivated the guy to comment - we know we've got something good.



We've declared February our Client Appreciation Month

Thank you!

Because our clients are so loyal, and because you have all been so kind in referring your friends and colleagues to Au Purr, we're giving each of our existing clients a **FREE VISIT** in February.

Our client retention rate is just phenomenal, and most of our work does come from referrals...from you, our happy clients, or from vets. You do such great PR work for us, this is the least we could do to thank you!

We remain honored to come into your homes and care for your four-legged family members. We are grateful for your trust in us, and for your faith in our professionalism. But mostly, we appreciate that you see how much we honestly care about our furballs, and how important it is to us to form relationships with each and every one of them. We love knowing their quirks, their favorite games, and just how to clean their ears so it doesn't tickle too much.

Thank you for being the best clients we could ever hope to find.