

# canine questions

By Sharon Harvey

**My dog stole and ate an entire stuffed zucchini from my kitchen counter in the time it took me to use the restroom. I'm not sure what was worse, having to prepare a new dish for my guests or dealing with what came out of him the next day. How do I stop him from counter surfing?**

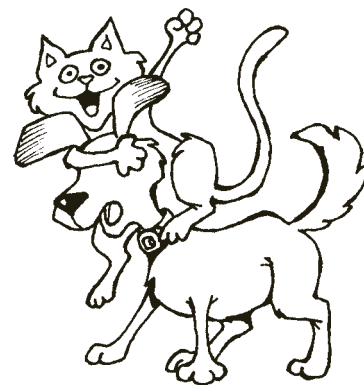
Well now, the first answer is pretty easy. Start by taking the "to counter surf or not to counter surf" decision out of his paws by NEVER leaving him unsupervised when there's food within his reach! After years of swiping olives from the Thanksgiving dinner table before being called to eat, I can't say that I really blame him! Find safe places where you can leave yummy things when you're not watching. Does he also get into the kitchen trash? Then put it under the sink or buy a container with a lid he can't open. Can he open your cabinet doors? Then get child-proof latches. It's a rare dog that will pass up food left within tantalizing reach, so you always need to manage the problem by thinking a few steps ahead of him.

You may also find that you have unknowingly reinforced him for the behavior. Adding the thrill of your chase to the thrill of stealing a delectable treat might be turning this indiscretion into an irresistible sport, even if your involvement is less than cheery. Stop chasing him, call him to you, and trade

for something of greater value... even if it's better people food. Then prevent it from happening again through management and training.

You can also use a set-up to dole out a fair punishment. Place a tasty treat on the edge of the counter and attach it with string to several soda pop cans filled with pebbles or nuts and bolts. Tape the opening of the shut so it doesn't make a mess. When he jumps up to steal the bait, the cans will come with it and he'll think his thieving has caused the house to come down around him. Best of all, as he'll probably come running to you for protection, he won't associate the unpleasantness with you, so your trusting relationship will remain intact.

For the truly proactive owner, teach him to go to his safe spot whenever there's food on counters or tables before, during or after meals. Reinforce him so heavily with GREAT treats for staying on his safe spot that he has no reason to steal anything better and he'll learn that a life of crime just doesn't pay!



**If you're having a problem with your cat or dog,** call the Rescue Village HelpLine at 440.338.4819, ext. 13 or send an e-mail to [askthetrainer@geaugahumane.org](mailto:askthetrainer@geaugahumane.org). We'll help you solve your problem or refer you to someone who can. The most frequently asked questions will find their way into the Rescue Village Reporter's Ask the Trainer column or onto Q104's Ask the Trainer radio segment that can be heard on Sunday's Wilde & Fee Morning Show during the 8 o'clock hour.

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To shelter and find homes for sick, injured, abused, and abandoned domestic animals that have no other alternatives

To foster compassion for all living things through education

To reduce pet overpopulation through spay/neuter programs

To prevent cruelty by advocating and enforcing animal protection laws

