

ing – so much so that this pup gathered every plush dog toy, piled them into her dog bed, and laid on them solemnly. They grieved together. It must have been profoundly helpful for this mourning woman to know that someone could understand, on any level, how she was feeling.

This will come as no surprise to dog lovers. We could probably all tell a few stories of our best friends comforting us during difficult times or refusing to leave our sides when we are ill. Another study at the University of Otago in New Zealand reported actual physical evidence of cortisol levels rising in dogs who heard a baby's distressed cry, compared to hearing simple white noise or contented baby babbling. This is empathy at its finest.

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EXPANDING AWARENESS: GROWING WITH YOUR DOG

One of the best parts of sharing your life with a dog is seeing each other grow and continue to learn. The biggest opportunities for growth often have to do with our more challenging emotions.

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You may have heard the phrase, “You can't change what you aren't aware of.” One of the roles of our canine companions can be to lovingly and non-judgmentally shed light on aspects of ourselves that may need healing. The more we learn about our dogs, the more we learn about ourselves.

In the 5,000 year old Ayurvedic tradition, every living being has a unique mind-body constitution, makeup or type. Ayurveda recognizes three main types which are comprised of the elements found in nature. Each of the three types is prone to certain forms of imbalance: airy types are more prone towards anxiety, fiery types towards anger, and earthy types towards congestion.

One of the first steps I take when addressing dog behavior issues is to determine their mind-body type. This gives me clues about the root of the problem, and a better understanding of which Ayurvedic healing practices for dogs would likely remedy it. More often than not, I'll find that the dog has the same mind-body type as her owner, making them prone to the same forms of imbalance. One client noticed her pooch was struggling with anxiety and nervousness and came to me for advice, asking earnestly, “What can I do to calm my dog down?” After some investigation, it became clear that her four-legged friend was shining light on the answer by mirroring her own anxiety. We discovered the real question was meant for her: “How do I calm myself?”

If you can relate and wonder how you can help calm your dog, the key might lie in calming yourself first.

TO CALM YOUR DOG, CALM YOURSELF

Here are some simple tips to release anxiety and invite ease. Focus on incorporating these into your life routinely and notice what happens to both you and your furry friend.

- Breathe Deeply. Take regular comfortable, deep inhalations and exhalations for one full minute. You'll feel tension, stress and reactivity dissipate. In its place will instantly be room for positive behavior and a balanced state of mind.
- Meditate. In a comfortable seated position, close your eyes and allow yourself to just be. Just relax. When thoughts, feelings, emotions, images, memories or colors appear, don't follow them, just let them appear and disappear. That's all meditation is: deep relaxation, a moment of doing nothing. Just be with yourself, twice daily for ten to 30 minutes.
- Find Time for Yourself. Go for a walk, watch a sunset, paint or get started on that book you keep meaning to get to. Essentially, spend time with yourself, doing things that replenish you and feed your soul.

THE BOTTOM LINE

We must take care of ourselves if we want to take care of others. It's often this simple: connect, remain present and ask yourself, “What is my dog showing me?” There are physical and emotional signs and clues in your dog's behavior that can help improve both of your lives. So keep this in mind: when your pooch is having issues of any kind, start with yourself. A well-balanced human creates a well-balanced dog. 🐾

secret garden



Saw Palmetto

Botanical Name: *Serenoa repens*

Family: Aracaceae

Part used: Berry

Saw palmetto is a fan palm that grows in the tropical parts of the southeastern United States, from the southern tip of South Carolina, across the southern part of Georgia, all over Florida and into south Texas. It has firm, sharp points on the tip of the fan leaf so wear protective clothing when you harvest the berries. Historically, indigenous people used the firm leaves to make thatched roofs. Native Americans used the berries for a food source as well as a medicinal tonic made by extracting it in water under the sun (solar infusion).

The medicine of the saw palmetto plant is in the berries. They are orange in color until ripened and are ready to harvest from mid-summer into the fall, at which time they turn dark blue to black and the taste is sweet.

Saw palmetto berries are high in chromium, fiber, iron, magnesium, manganese, niacin, phosphorus, potassium, riboflavin, selenium, thiamine and zinc. They also contain vitamins A and C, protein, silicon, calcium and approximately 85 percent fatty acids.

Over the centuries, the saw palmetto plant and its berries have been used to help treat everything from coughs to digestive issues to urinary tract infections. One of

the primary actions and medicinal properties of saw palmetto is as an antiandrogenic. Also known as testosterone blockers, antiandrogens prevent androgens like testosterone from affecting the body. One of the most detrimental effects of androgens on the body is that they stimulate cancer cell growth in the prostate. Lowering the levels of androgens or blocking the reach of cancer cells can help shrink or slow the growth of tumors in the prostate.

Saw palmetto also regulates the level of testosterone and acts as a bitter that can help with digestion. It's a mild diuretic as well as a urinary antiseptic, especially in the male body, is anti-inflammatory with the ability to reduce enlarged prostates and help with urinary incontinence issues.

I've used saw palmetto berry extract from the dried, ripe fruit at a 1:3 ratio (one part fruit to three parts menstruum of organic alcohol, water) successfully with male dogs with varying urinary issues. It can relieve painful urination, reduce the frequency of urination (by increasing the bladder's ability to hold more urine) or increase the flow with high concentrated urine where the kidneys were not the cause.

In addition, combining the berry with green tea extract, tulsi (holy basil), Japa-

nese knotweed, turmeric and nettle leaf has proven time after time to lessen the painful symptoms of prostate cancer in dogs, giving them not only relief from the pain by reducing inflammation and perhaps shrinking the tumor, but providing adequate urine flow and better quality of life for several years. Saw palmetto blended with nettle leaf extract can help alleviate the pain of urination (when the dog is struggling to urinate, yet only drops come out) via the anti-inflammatory constituents and light diuretic properties.

Cautions: *There are no definitive cautions with dogs that I can confirm but there is a potential for mild diarrhea due to the bitter compound. As always, consult a herbalist before using with a pregnant female.* 🐾



Joyce Belcher is an herbalist and formulator of pet supplements and herbal medicinals for veterinarians and is the founder of Herbs for Life Inc. She lives in York, Maine with her husband, two dogs and two cats; they are all rescues. Visit Joyce at petwellnessblends.com