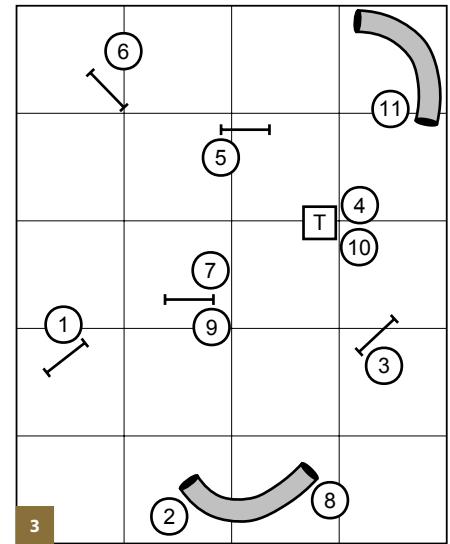
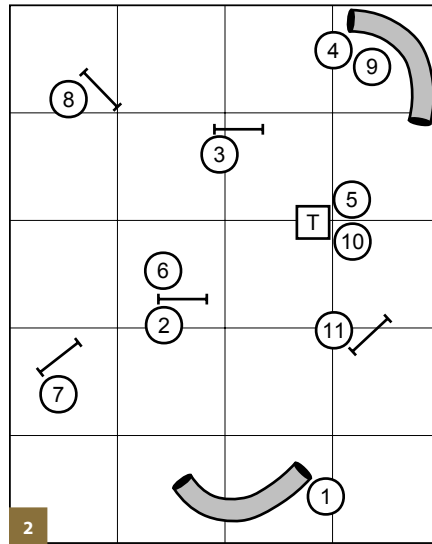
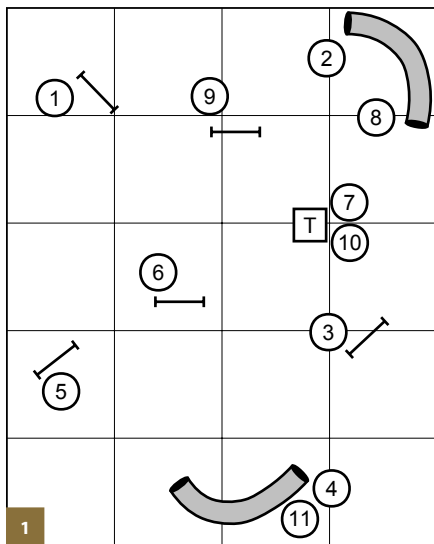


Improve Your  
Handling Skills  
at Home

# Backyard Dogs



By Karen Holik



This month's exercises focus on rewarding your dog. The most common obstacles we forget to reward are the table, jumps, and tunnels. These sequences are designed to give you lots of opportunities to reward these obstacles.

In the first few exercises, I have set up sequences where your dog will be approaching the table at speed. Approaching the table at speed and not coming off the other side is a skill that should be rewarded. When you're practicing the table, remember that your dog doesn't have to stay on the table for 5 seconds every time. I sometimes let the dog leave after 1, 2, or 3 seconds if I am thrilled with his performance. Be sure to also reward for fast downs and fast sits. And, if you run past the table and your dog remains in the position you left him, reward!

I reward the stationary position with food and the release from the table with a toy.

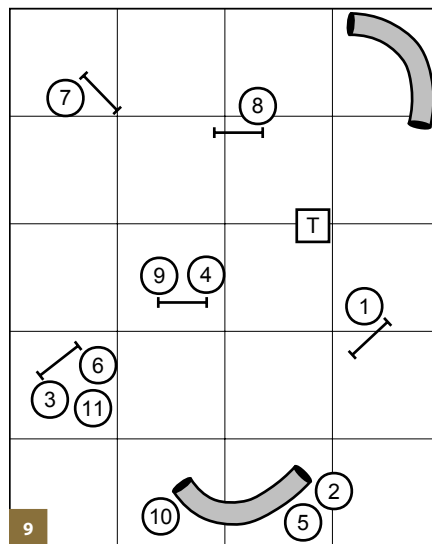
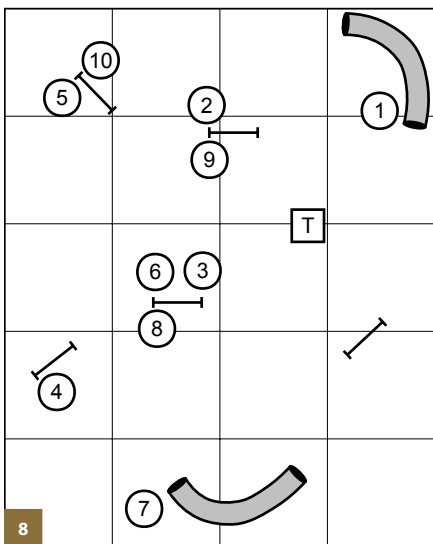
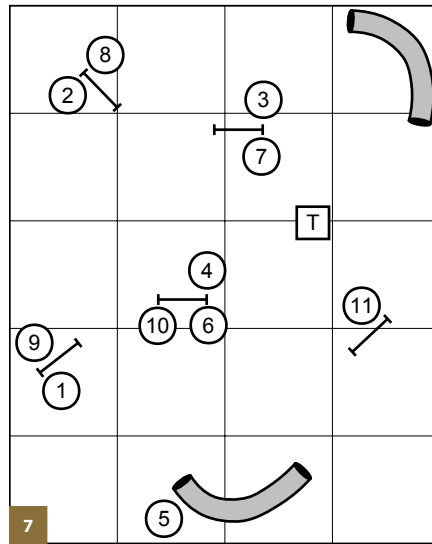
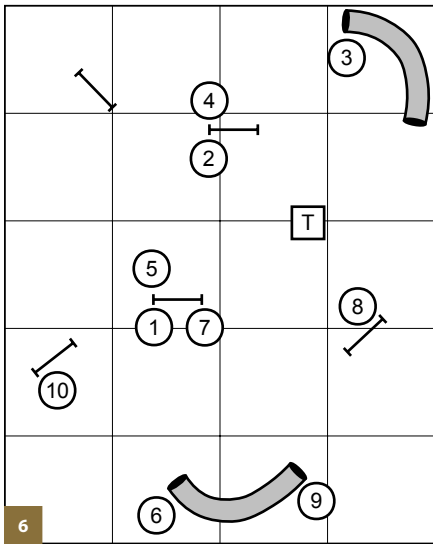
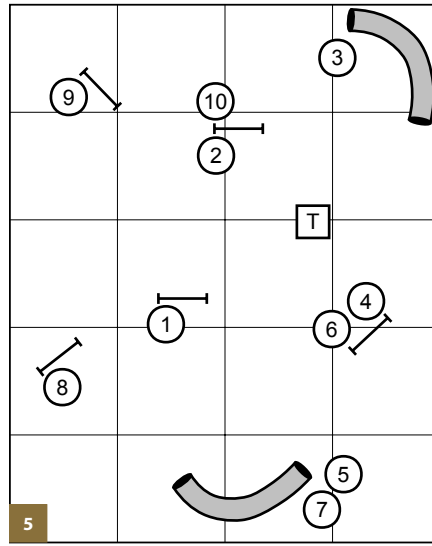
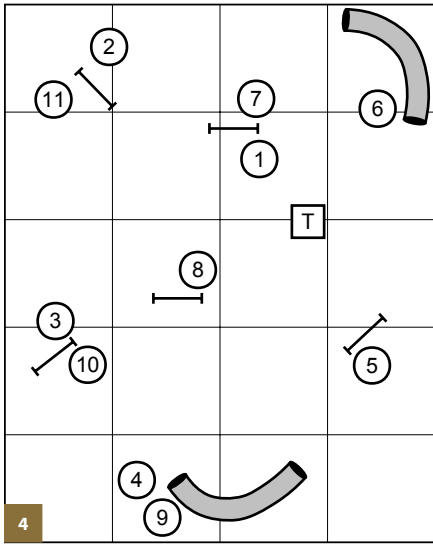
In **Figure 1** hold your dog on the table at #7 for 2 seconds and then release. For the table at #10, hold him for 7 or 8 seconds. Remember to make sure your dog releases on *your* release word and not before. By varying the amount of time you hold him on the table, your dog never knows when he is going to be released and he learns to pay more attention to your release word.

In **Figure 2** it would benefit you to be further away from the #5 table to handle the angle to jump #6. If your dog stays on the table as you run past, go back and reward him with food. Return to your position ahead of the dog before you release him from the table. Try the same

when running past the #10 table so you can get ahead to jump #11.

In **Figure 3** you might be a little behind the dog and need to send him to the #4 table because of the angle of the jump before it. Can your dog go to the table independently, with the same speed as when you are running with him?

If your dog doesn't drive to tunnels as enthusiastically as he does his favorite obstacles, then you need to work on this skill. **Figure 4** is a fast sequence that gives you opportunities to reward the dog if he drives to tunnels #4 and #6. When rewarding my dog for tunnels, I use a very motivating toy and verbal praise. When my dog is driving to the tunnel as fast as I think he can, I say, "Good dog," and



throw the toy just as he exits. Using verbal praise gives me a way to reward my dog on course when I can't have a toy. You can always reward your dog with something other than toys or food, and you should. He should be happy to be with you, and he will be if you tell him he is a "good boy" for doing what you ask.

This exercise also features a sharp turn from the exit of the #8 tunnel to jump #10. When your dog is driving to the tunnel, he will have to work to make a tight turn. You should reward the dog immediately if he gives you a tight turn here.

**Figures 5 and 6** present more opportunities for rewarding your dog for driving to the tunnel and also for making sharp turns out of the tunnels to the next jump. Reward as much as you want—I am sure your dog won't mind at all!

When is the last time you rewarded your dog for doing a jump? What about the last time you rewarded your dog for doing 180s, 270s, or serpentines? What about rewarding him for making a tight turn when you do a front cross or rear cross? **Figures 7 through 10** offer the opportunity to reward all of these skills.

When you're training, start rewarding tough jump sequences or even just one jump if you feel your dog made a real effort to drive ahead or turn back in the correct direction. You will notice a remarkable difference in your course times as your dog becomes more and more confident. 🐕