



## K9 Nose Work© Intro to Odor Handling Odors



Thank you for your enthusiastic participation in the recent K9 Nose Work© clinic. Now that your dog has been introduced to our first target odor, Birch (“Sweet Birch,” *Betula Lenta*), it’s important for you to follow certain protocols in handling odor when you practice at home and elsewhere.

### CARING/STORING OF ODORS

I shared a few cotton swabs so you can begin your training. Please be sure to keep these in a glass jar with an airtight lid. Baby food jars work well or you can purchase something specifically for the purpose. Keep these where your dog cannot get to them.

Best practices is to only use tweezers or rubber gloves to handle the cotton swabs but the bottom line is to be aware of contamination if you do not. If you touch the raw swabs you can contaminate anything else you touch. Your dog may notice the places you touch but it is not SOURCE odor so they do not get paid. However, with the novice dogs this can be very confusing so do your best to NOT contaminate your environment. The swabs do not need to be refrigerated but you will want to keep them away from extremes of heat/cold and never expose to open flames.

The swabs may be used over and over, as long as they don’t get dirty/contaminated. Simply place used swabs back into your jar of swabs and they will refresh. As long as the dog can detect the odor and the swabs are not dirty they can be use indefinitely. Some people have a separate jar for “dirty swabs” that may be used but keep in mind whatever has contaminated them may also become important to the dog.

### USING THE ODORS

There are many options of “hide containers” that can hold the swabs: Tins w/holes, toothbrush holders, pill holders w/holes, straws, flower stem holders, etc. Some larger tins can hold many swabs. Others like straws only hold 2-3. You can get creative but remember to vary the number of swabs so your dog gets used to searching for different strengths. We often use magnets with the tins so they can be fastened to metal objects but BE SURE the magnets are INSIDE the tin.

We use hide containers to keep the swabs from getting dirty and to protect the environment. The reason we do not use “raw” cotton swabs is the same reason we are careful with handling: contamination. We use different kinds of hide containers so the dogs don’t get used to just one type and start looking for the hides.

### WHEN YOU PRACTICE

Because your dog is new to this part of the game it is very important to keep the hides simple and keep “pairing” with your dog’s favorite reward by placing the food on top of the hide. As we discussed this allows for perfect timing of the reward and allows you the ability to stand back a bit and observe your dog work. Watch the changes of behavior as the dog zeroes in on that source! You’ll want to keep hides around nose-height and below.

You can use one hide or multiple odors but be very careful that your dog doesn’t develop habits that can be hard to break: Picking up and/or retrieving the hide containers; Trying to eat the hide containers; Pawing at the hide containers; Etc. If your dog begins to elicit any of those responses interrupt and move



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your dog on but be careful NOT TO CORRECT AND DON'T PULL YOUR DOG OFF ODOR, just change their focus. Many of those dogs do better with multiple odors so they know the game continues and other reward opportunities are available. You can also put the hides in places that make it hard for the dog to get their mouth around (partially under a brick, for example) but you still want to pair.

IF your dog returns to a hide that they've already found you need to pay them again at this stage. You can prevent this by putting them on leash and just not letting them get back to that hide. But again, be very careful not to correct! We WANT them responding to odor and they're at a very important formative stage of learning how to work with odor so we don't want to impose our "rules" by way of saying "no" or leash corrections.

### LOCATIONS OF PRACTICE

Be sure to practice in different places and away from home. However, DO NOT leave odors unattended in a public park, DO NOT take odors to another trial venue like Obedience or Agility and NEVER put hides on objects and articles that are used in other sports. First off, odors placed anywhere will leave a "lingering odor" and dogs WILL notice that location for potentially many weeks afterwards. Remember also that there are dogs who cross train in multiple venues. You do not want to be "that person" who ruined a beautiful run because you distracted the dog in the ring with odor. (And yes, they can smell it from the parking lot!) You also don't want to be "that person" who sets a hide and another dog is corrected for responding to odor when the owner was unaware there was odor in the area. This is so important to be a good steward of K9NW and to be courteous to others.

When you do practice at home, be sure all your other pets are put away. This must be one dog at a time. Some people have made the mistake of placing hides in the kitchen or on counters which may encourage counter-surfing. You have your own house and manners rules that should take priority. We don't have real working dogs who would be encouraged to get onto the counters for odor! 😊

### FINAL RESPONSE/INDICATION

Some training methodologies begin with a final indication. In K9NW training we do not, for several reasons;

- It takes the focus away from the hunt and the dog's unique search style and turns it into an obedience exercise
- It interjects the handler's wishes instead of watching what develops naturally
- Some dogs don't understand it's finding odor that earned the reward, not the trained response
- It can backfire later when the dog gets frustrated with another layer of challenges and begins offering the final response NOT at source. This creates a terrible cycle of handler not trusting dog who doesn't trust the handler who doesn't trust the dog, etc.

### DISPOSAL OF USED COTTON SWABS

Eventually your swabs will become soiled and you will dispose of them. BE AWARE that your dog will be able to smell them in your garbage! Place them in a trash bin where your dog does not have access.



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### MAKING MORE ODOR

If you are interested in making your own scented swabs you will need to purchase the essential oil. Keep in mind this MUST be a 100% Essential Oil, not a therapeutic oil or blend. The botanical name is “Betula Lenta.” There are several sources where you can purchase oils. Your local health food store may also carry it although Birch oil has become harder to come by in some places.

We also use PURE COTTON SWABS WITH PAPER STICKS. Although we are careful to avoid this but in the event a dog does swallow a swab it’s likely to pass easily. Also, some plastics will melt and off-gas with exposure to the oils.

To make your swabs you will cut in half several swabs and place them into a large glass jar. Note: They are easier to cut with garden pruning shears. Drizzle by dropper a small amount of oil on the inside surface of the jar. (The amount will be determined by the number of swabs and size of the dropper so it’s hard to give quantity.) Close the jar and shake up the swabs so the oil can be evenly distributed. You will then “cook” the swabs for 24-48 hours before use. When you open the jar if it seems too strong just add more swabs and cook for another 24 hours. If the odors seems too weak add some more oil and cook again.

If you’d rather not go to the trouble of making your own you can purchase pre-made swabs from me at All Good Dogs, LLC. Amy Herot (co-founder of NACSW/K9NW) and I are partners in the products division at AGD. We supply all the official odors for K9NW Trials around the country. You can find us online at [www.allgooddogs.biz](http://www.allgooddogs.biz). We have oils, swabs, tins, kits, magnets, etc. At this point you mostly need the swabs and some hide containers and an airtight container in which to keep them but there are a lot of goodies to choose from. 😊

### KEEP IT FUN!

If you have any questions, please feel free to ask! If you’re on my Facebook page for **Joyride K9 Dog Training** you can ask me there or you can send me a private message. Remember to keep your searches fun! You and your dog should be enjoying this new discovery about scent, how it moves in the environment and how your dog finds it. We really want to stress the importance of LEARNING FROM YOUR DOG! They are our teachers and they have so much to share with us. We just need to listen. 😊

**Enjoy!**

~ Kimberly Buchanan ~ [kim@joyridek9.com](mailto:kim@joyridek9.com) ~ Joyride K9 Dog Training ~ [www.joyridek9.com](http://www.joyridek9.com) ~