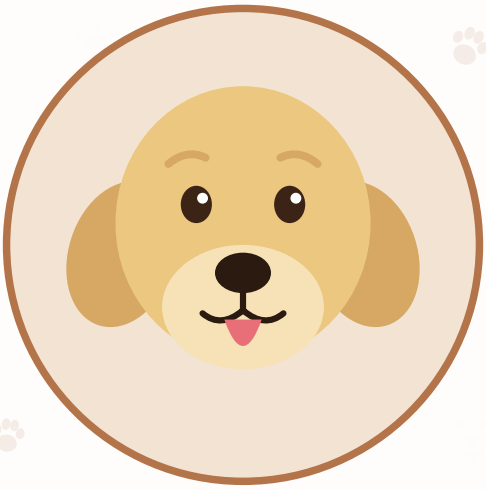


FREE BONUS GUIDE

The Food Thief Fix

Stop the counter surfing, bin raiding and scavenging.

Bonus guide for The Complete Labrador Guide

Before We Begin

You turn your back for three seconds and the sandwich is gone. The bin has been tipped over again. On walks, your Lab hoovers up chicken bones, bread crusts and things you'd rather not think about. And at dinner, a pair of big brown eyes stares at every forkful.

If that's your life, you're living with a Labrador. Labs are one of the most food-driven breeds in the world, and some carry a gene variant linked to feeling hungrier than other dogs.

That doesn't mean you have to live with a food thief. This plan shows you how to make stealing stop paying, teach your Lab what to do instead, and keep them safe from the dangerous things they might swallow.



Before We Begin





Why Labs Steal

It pays, sometimes

Most of the time, your Lab finds nothing on the counter. But every now and then, they hit the jackpot: a whole roast chicken, a packet of biscuits, a buttery plate. Rewards that come *sometimes* create the strongest habits of all. It's the same reason people keep playing slot machines.

Telling off doesn't work

If you shout after the theft, your Lab has already eaten the reward. All they learn is to steal when you're not looking, or to swallow things quickly before you can take them away.

They're tall and clever

An adult Lab can easily reach most worktops and tables. They also learn quickly which cupboards open, which bins tip, and which family members drop food.

Hunger is real

Some Labs genuinely feel hungrier than other dogs. That's why management is so important for this breed.

Why Labs Steal

The Food Thief Assessment

Tick what your Lab does:

- ☐ Takes food from kitchen worktops
- ☐ Takes food from the table
- ☐ Raids the bin
- ☐ Steals from children's hands
- ☐ Begs at mealtimes
- ☐ Scavenges on walks
- ☐ Opens cupboards or the fridge
- ☐ Guards stolen food

> **Guarding:** if your Lab growls, freezes or snaps when you go near stolen food, don't try to grab it. Use the swaps in Part 5, and get help from a qualified behaviourist.

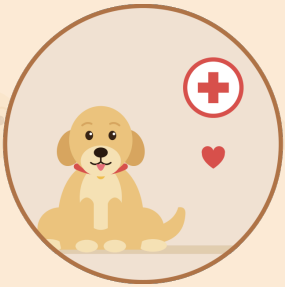


Dangerous Foods

A food-stealing Lab is at risk of eating something harmful. Keep these well out of reach:

- **Chocolate,** especially dark and baking chocolate
- **Grapes, raisins, sultanas and currants**
- **Onions, garlic, leeks and chives**
- **Xylitol,** a sweetener in some sugar-free gum, sweets, peanut butters and baked goods
- **Macadamia nuts**
- **Cooked bones,** which can splinter
- **Corn on the cob,** which can cause blockages
- **Alcohol, caffeine and some medicines**
- **Mouldy food from the bin**

> **If your Lab eats something dangerous,** call your vet or an emergency vet straight away, even if they seem fine. Tell them what, how much, and when.



Management First

Before any training, take away the jackpots. This is the single most important step.

Step 1: The 30-Day Clean Counter

For 30 days, keep every worktop and table completely clear of food. Put food in cupboards, the fridge or a high shelf the moment you're done with it.

Step 2: Secure the Bin

Use a bin with a locking lid, or keep it in a cupboard with a child lock.

Step 3: Gate the Kitchen

Use a baby gate to keep your Lab out of the kitchen when you can't supervise.

Step 4: Children's Snacks

Children eat at the table or behind a gate. Never let children walk around eating near your Lab.

Step 5: One Feeder

One person is responsible for feeding your Lab, so they don't get fed twice.

Teaching "Leave It"

"Leave it" teaches your Lab that ignoring food is the fastest way to get a reward.

Step 1: The Closed Fist

Hold a treat in a closed fist. Let your Lab sniff, lick and nudge. Wait. The moment they back off, say "yes" and give a *different* treat from your other hand. Never give the treat from the fist.

Step 2: Add the Words

When your Lab backs off straight away, say "leave it" as you present your fist.

Step 3: The Open Hand

Hold the treat on an open hand. If your Lab moves towards it, close your hand. When they hold back, reward from your other hand.



Teaching "Leave It"

Step 4: On the Floor

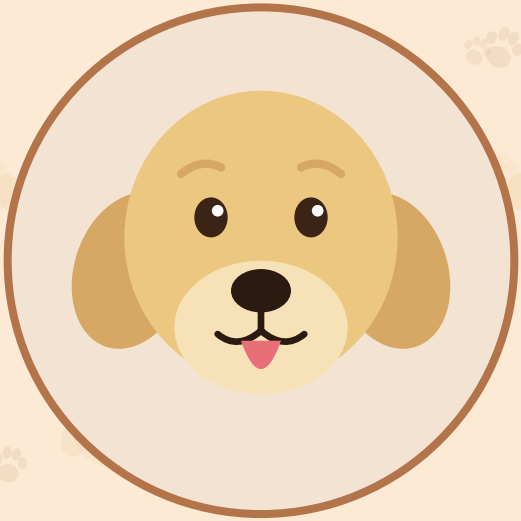
Put a treat on the floor and cover it with your foot. Reward your Lab for looking away or looking at you. Gradually uncover it.

Step 5: On a Low Table

Place a treat on a low coffee table. Reward your Lab for leaving it. Then try with a plate of food.

Step 6: Real Life

Practise with dropped food in the kitchen (with your Lab on a lead at first), then on walks.



Swaps & Drops

Sometimes your Lab will get something before you can stop them. Never chase them; it becomes a game, and they may swallow it quickly. Use a swap instead.

The Swap

1. Practise with toys first. Offer a tasty treat, say "swap," and reward when your Lab lets go.
2. Give the toy back, so they learn that swapping doesn't always mean losing things.
3. Practise 5–10 times a day.
4. When your Lab grabs something they shouldn't, use the same swap.

The Treasure Trade

If your Lab grabs something dangerous, throw a handful of high-value treats on the floor away from the item. While they eat, calmly pick up the item.

Mealtime Manners

Step 1: The Mat

During family meals, your Lab lies on their mat a few metres from the table.

Step 2: Reward Calm

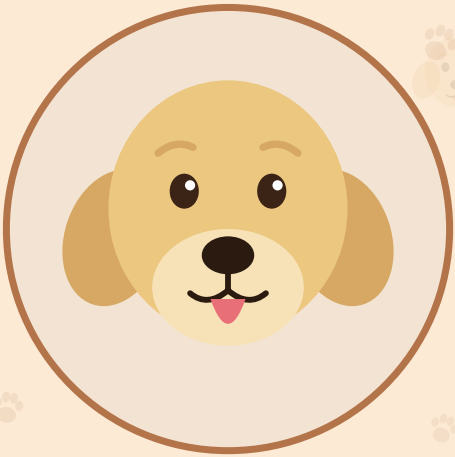
Every 30 seconds, quietly drop a treat on the mat. Over a few weeks, space the treats out more.

Step 3: Never From the Table

No one feeds your Lab from the table, ever. One dropped chip is enough to keep begging alive.

Step 4: A Chew for Dinner

Give a long-lasting chew or a stuffed food toy on the mat during meals.



Cooking

While you cook, your Lab is either on their mat with a chew, or behind the kitchen gate. Dropped food is dangerous (onions, hot food, bones), so keep them out of the cooking area.



PART 7

The Walk Scavenger

Many Labs try to eat everything on walks: bread, bones, takeaway leftovers, even other animals' poo.

Step 1: Practise "Leave It" at Home

Your Lab needs a strong "leave it" before you try it on walks.

Step 2: Watch the Ground

Look ahead for food on the ground and steer your Lab away before they find it.

Step 3: "Leave It" and Reward

When your Lab notices something on the ground, say "leave it" and reward them for looking at you.

Step 4: Give Them a Job

Bring a toy for your Lab to carry. A full mouth can't scavenge.

Step 5: Consider a Basket Muzzle

If your Lab eats dangerous things on walks, a well-fitted basket muzzle (introduced positively) can keep them safe while you train.

The Kitchen Boundary

A kitchen boundary teaches your Lab to wait outside the kitchen while you cook, without needing a gate every time. It takes a few weeks, so keep using the gate while you train.

Step 1: Pick the Line

Choose a clear line, such as the doorway or the edge of the kitchen floor. A mat just outside the kitchen makes it easier.

Step 2: Reward Staying Out

Stand in the kitchen with your Lab outside. Toss treats onto the mat while they stay outside the line. If they step over, calmly walk them back and start again.

Step 3: Add Movement

Walk around the kitchen, open cupboards and move pans. Reward your Lab for staying on their mat.

Step 4: Add Food

Practise with real food on the counter. Reward generously for staying out.

The Kitchen Boundary

Step 5: Add Time

Build up to a whole meal being cooked, rewarding every so often.

Step 6: Keep Managing

Use the gate whenever you can't watch. The boundary is a skill, not a lock.



"Off" Step by Step

If your Lab puts their paws on the counter, "off" tells them to put four paws back on the floor.

1. Lure your Lab's front paws up onto your lap or a low step, then toss a treat onto the floor and say "off" as they get down.
2. Repeat until your Lab hops down as soon as you say "off."
3. Practise in the kitchen with nothing on the counters.
4. When your Lab starts to put their paws up for real, say "off" and reward four paws on the floor.
5. Reward your Lab often for simply standing or lying in the kitchen with all four paws down. This is the behaviour you want to see more of.



Food Thief Situations

Parties and barbecues

Plates are left at dog height, guests drop food, and some people sneak treats. Keep your Lab on a lead, behind a gate, or in a quiet room with a chew.



Food Thief Situations

Christmas and celebrations

Chocolate, mince pies, grapes, nuts and cooked bones are everywhere. Keep food out of reach, and ask guests not to feed your dog.

Visitors' bags

Handbags often contain chewing gum (which may contain xylitol), medicines and snacks. Keep visitors' bags and coats out of reach.

Children's lunchboxes and school bags

Keep them on hooks or in a cupboard as soon as children come home.

Cat food

Feed cats on a high surface or behind a cat flap your Lab can't fit through.

Picnics and cafés

Use the mat and a long-lasting chew. Sit away from other people's food.

Your 21-Day Plan

- **Days 1–3:** clear counters, secure the bin, gate the kitchen.
- **Days 4–7:** "leave it" with a closed fist and open hand.
- **Days 8–10:** "leave it" on the floor. Start the Swap with toys.
- **Days 11–14:** mealtime mat routine.
- **Days 15–18:** "leave it" with a plate on a low table.
- **Days 19–21:** practise "leave it" on walks.



10 Popular Questions Answered

1. Will my Lab ever stop stealing? With management and training, most Labs steal far less. Management should stay in place for life.

2. Should I shout when my Lab steals? No. It teaches them to steal when you're not looking.

3. My Lab only steals when I leave the room. Gate the kitchen whenever you're not there.

4. Should I feed my Lab more so they're not hungry? Not without talking to your vet. Use puzzle feeders to make meals last longer.

5. My Lab eats poo on walks. Help! Use "leave it," pick up quickly, and talk to your vet if it's frequent.



10 Popular Questions Answered

6. Is it OK to give my Lab scraps? Many human foods are harmful, and scraps lead to begging and weight gain.

7. My Lab growls if I go near stolen food. Don't grab it. Use the Treasure Trade and talk to a behaviourist.

8. My children keep getting snacks stolen. Children eat at the table or behind a gate.

9. Can I use a bitter spray? It may help on furniture, but it won't stop food stealing.

10. What if my Lab eats something toxic? Call your vet straight away.

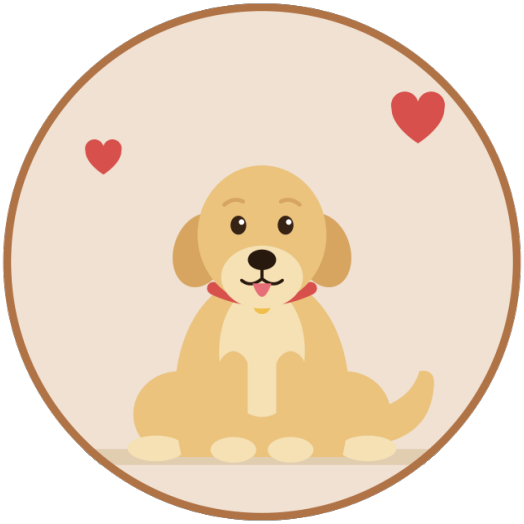


Your Quick Checklist

- ☐ Counters and tables clear.
- ☐ Secure bin.
- ☐ Kitchen gate.
- ☐ "Leave it" practised daily.
- ☐ Swap practised with toys.
- ☐ Mat at mealtimes.
- ☐ Danger foods list on the fridge.



A Final Word



Your Lab's love of food is part of what makes them so easy to train. With the right management and a strong "leave it," that food drive can work for you, not against you.

Keep the counters clear, keep practising, and enjoy your meals in peace.