

DEAR MISS PUDDLES



Residents, pets, and those golden retrievers currently pretending not to hear your names! Allow me to introduce myself. I am Miss Puddles Bellingham-Worthington III, though close friends may call me “Miss Puddles”, and close enemies generally call me “Your cat is on the dining table again.”

After twelve years supervising a screened lanai, three years monitoring a koi pond for suspicious behavior, and one regrettable Thanksgiving involving a decorative turkey centerpiece, I have retired from household management to devote my remaining years to community guidance.

You're welcome.

Over the years, I have observed many things about humans. You are capable creatures. You invented air conditioning, canned tuna, and those little crunchy salmon treats shaped like lobsters. Yet somehow you continue to lose arguments with animals weighing under fourteen pounds. Hmm, curious!

This column exists because pets have concerns. Deep, sometimes emotional concerns. Occasionally concerns involving squirrels. Every month, residents may submit questions regarding pet etiquette, behavioral confusion, emotional turmoil, mysterious barking, unexplained zooming, patio gecko diplomacy, or tensions involving robotic vacuum cleaners. I shall answer them with compassion, wisdom, and the quiet disappointment of a cat who watched someone buy “designer rain boots” for a Labradoodle.

Letter #1 - “My dog barks at everything!”

Dear Miss Puddles,

Our terrier barks at joggers, golf carts, leaves, clouds, and once at a decorative heron statue. We love him dearly, but the entire cul-de-sac now knows when Amazon arrives. Help!

- Exhausted on Medinah



Dear Exhausted,

Your terrier is not “overreacting.” Your terrier has appointed himself Director of Homeland Security. This is common among small dogs and retired neighborhood watch captains. The key here is redirection. When barking begins, avoid shouting “QUIET!” repeatedly from across the room like an increasingly emotional cruise director. Instead, approach calmly.

1. Interrupt with a cue such as “Thank you, all secure!” in a happy, indoor voice.
2. Every time he barks at a cloud, bark back. Do this once. You will never have to do it again.
3. Approach the terrier slowly, making firm eye contact. Say “Stand down, Sergeant.” If he continues barking, he outranks you now. Salute and walk away.

Dogs bark because barking *works*. The mail carrier leaves every single time, in a hurry. From the dog’s perspective, this is self-affirmation.

Miss Puddles’ Holistic Suggestion:

Lavender calming wipes are lovely. However, I have found that playing a recording of a *vacuum cleaner* causes most terriers to briefly reconsider their entire career. Try also: a recording of another dog barking, played from the opposite end of the house. Watch him attempt to file a report on himself.

Continued

Letter #2 - "Our cat attacks our feet at 3 AM"

Dear Miss Puddles,

Our orange tabby hides under the bed and attacks ankles at night. We are beginning to suspect he enjoys this.

— Sleep Deprived on (sore) Winged Foot

Dear Sleep Deprived,

Of course he enjoys this. Your cat is nocturnal, athletic, and unemployed. Cats often develop nighttime ambush habits because humans unintentionally reward them with dramatic screaming, dancing, and immediate engagement. He has constructed an entirely legal after-hours ankle economy, and you are the inventory.

1. Wear oven mitts on your feet to bed. Say nothing. The cat will be unsettled for weeks.
2. When he attacks, blow a party horn, firmly, once. Not twice. Once is theater. Twice is war.
3. Fake a dramatic slow-motion fall. Collapse entirely. Make it a whole thing. The cat expects screaming and fleeing, not theater. Confusion is your friend.



Miss Puddles' Holistic Suggestion:

Puzzle feeders are excellent. I personally recommend hiding one underneath a second puzzle feeder, creating a puzzle feeder *ouroboros* that occupies the feline intellect until approximately Thursday. A tiny emotional pirate with no time to plan is a manageable tiny emotional pirate.



Letter #3 - "Our Golden Steals Pool Noodles"

Dear Miss Puddles,

Our dog drags pool noodles around the neighborhood like captured trophies. Neighbors are amused for now.

— Concerned but Slightly Impressed

Dear Concerned,

Goldens are optimists with fur and zero awareness of property rights. Your dog does not believe he is stealing pool noodles. He believes he is *liberating* for a better life. There is a difference, legally speaking, though I am not a lawyer.

1. Construct a decoy pool noodle. Leave it in the yard, labeled with a small flag. When he takes that one, applaud as though he has won a ribbon at a county fair. He will tell no one about the other noodles, but he will feel closure.
2. Introduce a "Pool Noodle Treaty" by placing a designated noodle by the front door with his name on it, written in permanent marker, because he will check! Dogs do not read, but they respect ceremony.
3. Dogs repeat behaviors that produce joy, praise, or startled retirees pointing from golf carts. Attach a small GoPro. Enter the footage in a film festival. Recoup your losses.

Miss Puddles' Holistic Suggestion:

For highly social dogs, scent-based enrichment can reduce attention-seeking mischief. Scatter-safe sniffing games in the yard often work wonders. Also, hydration matters in Magnolia Point heat. Add pet-safe frozen watermelon treats during summer months. But serve them on *plates*; he's earned that.

- STORY, PHOTOS: EDITOR