

The Hide-and-Seek *Protocol*

Week One to Week Fifty-Two.

A printable companion to the Northwest Lagotto truffle essay. Week-by-week progression from scent-pairing at eight weeks through field foraging at one year — with materials list, troubleshooting notes, and a reference card.

The Single Most Important Decision in This Protocol

IMPORTANT

Do not use commercial truffle oil. Most commercial truffle oil is flavoured with 2,4-dithiapentane — a petroleum-derived compound your dog will never encounter in an actual truffle. A dog trained on this compound will not recognise real truffles in the field. Use only real overripe truffle pieces. During truffle season (November–March), small pieces are available from foragers. If in doubt, ask us.

MATERIALS LIST

Essential

- Real overripe truffle pieces (black Périgord or Oregon white truffle)
- Small airtight tins with perforated lids, 3–5 cm diameter
- High-value food reward: real meat or cheese — not kibble
- Short lead, 2–3 m, for early outdoor sessions
- A notebook or this log — record every session

As you progress

- Short trowel for burying tins at depth
- Flags or survey markers to track hide locations
- Long lead, 8–10 m, for open-field work

PHASE 1 — FOUNDATION

WEEKS 1–8

Weeks 1–2

Scent in the Fist

Hold a tiny truffle piece in a closed fist. Offer both fists. When the puppy noses or paws the correct hand, open it immediately. Two to three minute sessions, two to three times per day. Always end on a success.

Weeks 3–4

Scent in a Tin

Transfer the piece to a small perforated tin. Reward nose-contact with the tin. Introduce a marker word or clicker the instant she touches the correct tin. Add a second empty tin as a decoy.

Weeks 5–6

Hidden in the Room

Place the tin under a towel or behind a cushion. Send her from across the room. Build to fully hidden by end of week six.

Weeks 7–8

Hidden Outdoors — Surface Level

Move sessions to the garden or yard. Hide under leaves, in long grass, against a fence post. She is now working with wind, ground scent, and distractions. Two minutes maximum. High-value reward on every find.

PHASE 2 — BUILDING DEPTH

WEEKS 9–24

Weeks 9–12

Under Mulch

Cover the tin with 1–2 cm of mulch or loose soil. She must now nose through substrate to reach the source. Reward the instant she indicates the correct spot, before she reaches the tin.

Weeks 13–16

Buried at Shallow Depth

Bury the tin at 3–5 cm in soft soil. She is learning to work the scent cone that rises above the hide, not follow a trail directly to the tin.

Weeks 17–20

Buried at Depth, Varied Terrain

Increase burial depth to 8–12 cm. Vary substrate and time since burying — aged hides are harder. Reduce your own body cues; let her work independently.

Weeks 21–24

Multiple Hides, Open Field

Two hides per session, 5–10 metres apart. Work an open field with a long lead. She should now quarter the ground and indicate independently.

PHASE 3 — FIELD WORK

WEEKS 25–52

Weeks 25–32

Aged and Fresh Hides

Alternate between hides buried the same day and hides buried 24–48 hours prior. A dog who can work both is developing real field versatility.

Weeks 33–40

Real Truffle Grounds

If you have access to forested ground where truffles are known, begin transitioning to live hides. Some dogs require a short adjustment period between the prepared tin and native-soil truffle scent.

Weeks 41–52

Independent Work and Distance

15–30 minute sessions in varied terrain. The dog should now quarter independently, indicate clearly, and wait for release before digging. By week fifty-two she has the foundation for formal field competition — or simply an enriched life doing what her breed was made for.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Problem: She loses interest quickly.

Solution: Sessions are too long or rewards are too low-value. Cut to 90 seconds. Switch to real cooked meat. End every session on a find.

Problem: She finds the tin but does not indicate clearly.

Solution: You are rewarding too late. Reward the instant her nose makes contact with the correct spot. Precision in timing builds precision in indication.

Problem: She checks the correct spot once, then wanders.

Solution: Back up one phase. Rebuild clarity at a shallower hide before increasing difficulty.

Problem: She finds hides easily indoors but fails outside.

Solution: Normal. Drop difficulty by one full phase when transitioning to a new environment. She will recover within two to three sessions.

Problem: She digs past the tin and keeps going.

Solution: She has learned that digging produces reward, not that indicating produces reward. Return to rewarding on first nose-contact above the buried tin, before any digging.

QUICK REFERENCE

Cut out and tape to the fridge.

PHASE	WEEKS	HIDE LOCATION	KEY RULE
Foundation	1–2	Fist	Real truffle only — never commercial oil
Foundation	3–4	Perforated tin, visible	Mark the moment of nose contact
Foundation	5–8	Hidden indoors / under leaves	2 min sessions maximum
Depth	9–16	Under mulch → 5 cm soil	Reward above the source, before digging
Depth	17–24	8–12 cm, varied terrain	Vary time since burying
Field	25–40	Open field, multiple hides	Let her work — reduce your cues
Field	41–52	Live truffle grounds	Build distance and independence

Northwest Lagotto · northwestlagotto.com · nwlagotto@gmail.com · 360-223-6989