

Context

Feeding street dogs is an act of compassion. However, regular feeding can unintentionally create problems for them. It can make street dogs dependent and reduce their natural foraging skills. It adversely affects their ability to interact with a wide variety of people, including those that dislike them. It also can lead to territorial and attachment behaviours like barking or chasing. These issues escalate conflicts between people, putting the safety of street dogs at risk. Strategic/modified feeding practices can ensure the well-being of street dogs while fostering harmony between people and dogs.

Pros of regular feeding	Cons of regular feeding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional source of food for street dogs • Socialised relations between street dogs and people • Sense of fulfilment for feeders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages dependency, reducing the ability to forage naturally • Reduces street skills and the ability to interact with different kinds of people causing human-dog conflict • Leads to territoriality and attachment, leading to barking and chasing • Promotes congregation, increasing dog fights and nuisance complaints • Attracts hostility from those averse to street dogs, risking harm or relocation, and even killing • Has generated several court cases asking for repeal of ABC Rules and eradication of street dogs/ban on all feeding in public spaces

Strategic Feeding: An approach that protects street dogs

Strategic feeding aims to retain the benefits of feeding street dogs—such as providing support to those in need and fostering positive human-dog relationships. At the same time, it minimizes the risks of dependency, conflict, and harm. By adopting strategic practices, feeders can promote the well-being of dogs and their peaceful coexistence with the community.

1. When to feed

Only feed animals that are sick, old, lactating, or starving or orphaned (i.e., young ones). Healthy dogs usually find enough food through foraging and do not require additional feeding.

2. Entirely avoid regular or complete feeding

Do not feed street dogs regularly or provide complete meals. Feeding should be occasional and limited in quantity to prevent dependency. Regular feeding can reduce their natural foraging skills, making them reliant on a few people and unable to interact safely with other people. It leads to conflict behaviours such as barking, chasing, and territorial aggression. By feeding sporadically and in smaller amounts, dogs remain self-reliant and better integrated into their environment.

3. Prevent congregation

Spread out feeding locations to avoid groups of dogs gathering, which leads to fights and community complaints. If dogs start to congregate in one location, stop feeding till they disperse completely.

4. Practice invisible feeding: choose discreet times and locations

Feed during quiet hours and away from highly visible places to minimize disturbances and reduce visibility to those averse to street dogs.

5. Leave no trace

Clean up any leftover food, containers, or waste to prevent negative reactions from the community,

6. Gradually reduce dependency

If dogs are already accustomed to regular feeding, reduce the quantity and frequency over time while monitoring their ability to forage independently.

7. Avoid treating street dogs like pets

Maintain distance to prevent street dogs from becoming overly attached to feeders, which can lead to territorial and conflict behaviours. Street dogs need the skills to negotiate human society on their own.

8. Adapt strategic feeding practices to address conflict

If feeding causes congregation or aggression, modify your approach or pause feeding temporarily. Completely ignore territorial dogs that bark, chase, follow or mob people to discourage attachment or dominance behaviours.

9. Engage with community concerns

Take complaints seriously and work collaboratively with mediators to resolve conflicts without confrontation.

10. Ensure dogs are vaccinated regularly

Vaccinate the dogs you feed, especially against rabies, to protect their health and public safety.

11. Provide fresh drinking water

Street dogs find it more difficult to access drinking water than food. Providing fresh drinking water alongside food is essential, particularly when feeding dry food like kibble. Keep water containers clean and regularly refilled. Liaise with municipal authorities and residents' associations to pre-empt concerns about mosquito breeding.

12. Do not rely solely on current laws about feeding and street dogs

Legal provisions that protect street dogs and support feeding can face challenges. Prioritizing responsible, conflict-free feeding creates community goodwill and ensures the safety and acceptance of street animals.