04.12.25 Treats, Trickery & the Joy of Enrichment

I never weed in the shark tank! confessions of a fish shop owner · https://shirleyaquatics.co.uk/knowledge/04-12-25-treats-trickery-the-joy-of-enrichment/

A very good friend of mine, let’s call him Len. Once said, “I don’t treat my dogs. I feed them.”
And to be fair, he has a house full of very happy dogs eating extremely good-quality food. But he doesn’t “treat” them.


Pleeaase!
Just one
more treat

Meanwhile, I'm writing this after making a special trip to Aldi for two things: frozen peas for our ducks and dog chews for our dogs. The only thing I bought for humans was paracetamol… partly to cope with the headache of keeping up with all these animal treats!

So that probably gives you an idea of which end of the spectrum I sit on.

But here's the real point: it's only human, to want to give our animals something extra, something that entertains them, enriches them, and brings a bit of variety into their day. And the lovely thing is, treating animals **enriches our lives too**. There's something deeply satisfying about seeing a pet enjoy something you've chosen just for them.

Many fish and reptiles, for example, naturally graze throughout the day. Offering something like glass-mounted grazing tablets in an aquarium isn't spoiling them; it's simulating a natural behaviour pattern. It gives them a varied food source that they can pick at in their own time, instead of being stuck to our mealtime schedule.

Now, whether you decide to "treat" your animals or not is entirely up to you. There's no right or wrong approach… with one important caveat:

Some species genuinely benefit from what we might casually call treats.

African cichlids: Benefit from occasionally being fed frozen or live brine shrimp. The shrimp shell helps to clean their digestive tract as it passes through them.

Koi: AKA swimming pigs! They will eat anything! What they benefit from is a good quality, regular diet, but freeze-dried krill has several health benefits, including natural colour enhancers.

Marine Tangs: They love their greens, freeze-dried algae, lettuce, spinach, attach it to a clip and watch them chomp away all day! It helps to prevent certain conditions like HLLE.

Plecostomus: Algae-eating catfish, you can sink a bit of cucumber or potato, which offers them a bit of variety, but not too much; you want them to crack on with their day job.

Goldfish: Frozen/live bloodworm, REALLY helps their digestion. In the case of Fancy goldfish (the fat ones) I would feed them this once a week.

Pufferfish: Feed them cockle-in-shell, it helps to keep their teeth in check

So from where I’m standing, why *wouldn’t* you give your fish — or any pet — a little treat now and then?
If it enriches them… and it enriches you… that feels like a win-win to me.

P.S. Len used to live next door to me, and two of his dogs, who we loved, used to hop the fence and visit us every day. One day, I got a phone call from Len, “Rich! For the love of god, will you stop treating my dogs! They won’t listen to a F****** word I say!” So, by all means, treat your own pets, but not someone else’s!

P.P.S I really would like to hear from you if you treat your fish or reptiles with something a little different! Maybe I can do a follow-up, “World of the bizarre, the strange things readers treat their pets”