

Dog Toys: One of Your Best Management Tools

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By choosing the right toys for your dog and using them wisely, you can make dog toys one of your very best dog-management tools.

Here are some different types of toys, examples of each, and how you can use each kind when managing your dog.

Chew Toys

Dogs NEED to chew. Not just puppies; adult dogs, too. If you don't provide them with chew toys to satisfy that need, what will they chew instead? The couch, the deck, the children's action figures...

Nylabones are excellent chew toys for dogs. They last a very long time, and the tiny pieces that flake off when they are chewed do not harm your dog if swallowed. Buy the hard kind, which is available in several shapes and sizes. Buy a size large enough that your dog can't swallow it. Try out different shapes; some dogs have preferences! If your dog doesn't pay much attention to Nylabones at first, soak them in chicken or beef broth and let them dry before you give them to him. Or smear a little cream cheese on them. You can also let another dog who likes Nylabones "start" them for your dog ... a few bite marks from another dog can make a Nylabone very appealing to yours!



Sterilized real bones that are hollow in the middle are another good choice for chewing. So are hard rubber toys such as *Kongs* and *Planet Kong Goodie Ships* and *Goodie Balls*, *Stuff-a-balls*, *Biscuit Blocks*, and *Premier's* line of purple, stuffable rubber toys. These toys and other similar ones are made to be stuffed with biscuits, or to have a soft goodie such as cream cheese or peanut butter smeared inside them. Stuffing them with different treats can make the toys new & different for your dog each time. Just remember to clean the rubber ones often with warm, soapy water. Some are dishwasher safe. And check out the amazing variety of toy-stuffing suggestions at www.kongcompany.com.



If your dog can tear off parts of a toy, it isn't safe for him to chew unsupervised. For this reason we do not recommend rawhide as a chew toy for dogs unless the chewing dog is very well supervised. Some dogs chew rawhide until it is soft, then tear pieces off and swallow them. Whatever size piece is swallowed has to work its way through the dog's digestive system, and if that's not possible the dog might end up at the emergency vet. Rawhide is also cured with salt, and chewing salty toys makes dogs thirstier and can interfere with housetraining. "Edible" chew toys, even if they are made of compressed rawhide pieces and offered by reputable companies, can cause digestive upset in some dogs. Other dogs do fine with them. Many dogs like *Greenies*, an edible breath-freshening chew. Use any of these in moderation until you see how well your dog tolerates them.

Buy a wide variety of chew toys and rotate them often to keep them interesting to your dog.

Food-Dispensing Toys

These toys are made to be filled with your dog's kibble at mealtime. He uses his paws and nose to push, roll, and flip the toys, making the kibble fall out piece by piece. Some dogs need to be shown how to get the food out of the toys, and some dogs seem to understand right away. Most dogs enjoy doing this, and

it occupies them for much longer than just gulping food out of a bowl. We suggest offering your dog's meals to him this way on occasion.

Examples of this kind of toy are the *MolecuBall*, *Buster Cube*, *Kong Wobbler*, *Treat Stik Tug-a-Jug*, *Talk to Me Treat Ball*, and *Roll-a-Ball Treat Ball*.



Interactive Toys

Dogs need chew toys available all the time, but there are many other toys that we recommend you reserve for your playtime with the dog. Bring one or more of these toys out when you want to play together. Have fun, then try to stop at the first sign that your dog is losing interest, just *before* he is ready to quit. This leaves your dog wanting more, and it also reinforces your leadership position – leaders decide when games begin and when they end. When you are done playing, put the interactive toy(s) you've been using away until another playtime. Most of these toys are not safe for dogs to chew. Also, leaders control the resources – bringing these toys out only when you want to play is another way to reinforce your leadership.

Examples of this kind of toy are: soft flying discs made especially for dogs (hard ones can hurt both your dog's mouth and your hand after the edges have been chewed); fleece toys that squeak, crackle, or rattle; rope toys; and balls of all kinds. Buy a wide variety of these, so that your dog never knows what fun toy you are going to produce next!

What are the benefits of having good toys?

The right dog toys can help you in the following ways:

- Your dog will burn off energy playing with toys.
- A dog with his own appealing toys to chew is less likely to chew your belongings.
- If your dog *does* pick up something you don't want him to chew, you can re-direct him to one of his own toys.
- Dogs are mentally stimulated by working for their food and treats. Chew toys, especially stuffed chew toys, and food-dispensing toys are a wonderful way to provide mental stimulation.
- You can make your dog's crate a more desirable place to be by putting a biscuit-stuffed Kong or other chew toy inside whenever you need to confine the dog.
- You can reinforce your leadership in your dog's eyes every day by bringing out interesting interactive toys, playing with him, and then putting those toys away.
- Your dog will be happier and more contented – so you will be, too!

Note: Make sure all of the toys your dog plays with are appropriate for the size and strength of your pet. Avoid using toys that are too small.

The toys listed in this article are ones we have used over for the years with great success. There are many other toys available that may work just as well for your pet.

For additional information contact your veterinarian or a skilled trainer. (We have a handout to provide information on locating a qualified trainer.)