

DESTRUCTIVE CHEWING AND DIGGING

A. Choose the right toys

1. Make certain to choose toys that are appealing to your dog. This may vary from dog to dog as some may be most attracted to texture or appearance, while others may be more attracted to a food inserted or stuffed into the toy.
2. Choose toys that are durable and safe. Dogs that enjoy chewing should be given toys that take as long as possible to destroy without losing interest. If rawhide is given, the pieces should be large enough for the puppy to gnaw, without chewing off large pieces that can be swallowed. Rolled or thick, flat sheets may be preferable to sticks or pieces with knots.
3. Change toys, or rotate through them to keep up their interest.
4. Choose toys that are not overly similar to your possessions (e.g., old shoes, towels or clothes, child toys, etc.).

B. Encourage play

1. Reward correct chewing. Use praise, affection, or occasionally toss a small treat to the puppy for chewing on its toys.
2. Lace toys with food. Many toys are designed so that they can be coated or stuffed with food treats to attract the pet. Freezing the toys with food inside may extend the duration of play, chewing, or eating food or toys. Manipulation toys, such as Buster Cube™, Tricky Treat™, Crazy Ball™, etc., deliver small pieces of food which serve to reward the dog as it chews and may further increase the duration of interest in the toy.

C. Provide a regular regime of exercise and play

1. An overabundance of energy and lack of acceptable activities can lead to exploration and chewing. Provide enough exercise, interactive play, and training to calm and settle the dog before leaving it alone or unsupervised.
2. A number of interactive play toys have been designed to combine play and social interaction with family members or other pets. These toys include balls, pucks, and floating toys for chase and retrieval and some for tugging and pulling.
3. Tug and pull toys may not be appropriate for all dogs. As long as you are the one to initiate the play, can stop the game on command, and the dog does not have a problem with aggression or overly exuberant play, then these toys may be an acceptable means of directing play and chewing to an appropriate outlet.

D. Preventing and deterring undesirable chewing

1. Even though your dog has a number of appealing toys and has received plenty of interactive play, training, and exercise, he or she may be attracted to chew and investigate some of your household possessions. Therefore, supervision or confinement to a crate or pen when you are unable to supervise should prevent any inappropriate chewing.
2. If you are not available to supervise and you wish to avoid confinement training, it might be possible to move potential targets out of your dog's reach (dog-proofing), use aversive tasting substances (e.g., Ropel™, Chew Guard™, Bitter Apple™), or use avoidance devices (Snappy Trainer™, Critter Gitter™, Scraminal™, Spray Barrier™, Ssscat™) to keep your dog away from items that might be chewed.
3. If you catch the dog in the act of chewing something it shouldn't, immediately interrupt it with a sharp noise or a pull on a leash if one has been left attached. Then, give a proper chew toy to the pet and praise it as soon as it begins to chew. However, even if you consistently catch and interrupt your pet when it is chewing on inappropriate items, this may only teach it to avoid chewing these items in your presence.
4. Never punish after the act and never use physical punishment.

E. Chewing and anxiety

1. Chewing and destructiveness may also arise in response to anxiety and should not be considered as an attempt to 'get even with you.' Treatment requires correcting the underlying anxiety and this often requires a consultation with your veterinarian or a behaviorist to determine the cause of the problem and develop an appropriate treatment program.
2. Separation anxiety: some dogs become extremely distressed when they cannot be with their owners (separation anxiety), and may respond with destructive, housesoiling, or barking behavior. These dogs need to be taught that they cannot receive attention on demand, but rather for spending progressively longer periods of time away from the owner. Prior to departures the owners should ignore the dog and try and keep it distracted with some food-stuffed toys when they leave.

F. Digging

1. First determine why the dog is digging. Dogs may dig to bury or retrieve bones and toys, to find a cool place to lie down, to escape from confinement, to dig for rodents or prey, and as a form of play and exploration. You'll need to know why your dog is digging in order to develop a treatment program.
2. Supervise your dog while outdoors and interrupt the behavior if you catch the pet in the act.
3. Use booby traps to deter digging of a particular area, such as placing balloons that pop or water in the hole or a motion detector device next to the hole.
4. Prevent access to the area by using chicken wire or hardwire over the area, rocks in the hole, paving or placing gravel in the area, by confining to a pen away from the area, or by using avoidance devices such as the citronella spray collar avoidance units.
5. Dogs that dig as a form of play or exploration will need increased stimulation in the form of training and exercise and outlets for play and chewing (see above).
6. Dogs that dig to flush out prey and those that dig cooling holes will need to be prevented from digging by confinement or avoidance devices, or by providing them with an acceptable area for digging. Digging in this area can be ensured by supervision and reinforcement of desirable digging or by confinement to the area.