

Dog Toys



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For dogs and other animal companions, toys are not a luxury but a necessity. Toys help fight boredom in dogs left alone, and toys can even help prevent some problem behaviors from developing. Although cats can be pretty picky when it comes to enjoying particular toys (ignoring a \$10 catnip toy but marveling over a piece of crumpled newsprint), dogs are often more than willing to play with any object they can get their paws on. That means you'll need to be particularly careful when monitoring your dog's playtime to prevent any "unscheduled" activities.

Safe Toys

Many factors contribute to the safety or danger of a toy, and a number of them depend on your dog's size, activity level and preferences. Another factor is the environment in which your dog spends his time. Although we cannot guarantee your dog's enthusiasm or his safety with any specific toy, we can offer the following guidelines.

Be Cautious

The things that are usually the most attractive to dogs are often the very things that are most dangerous. Dog-proof your home by removing string, ribbon, rubber bands, children's toys, pantyhose and anything else that could be ingested.

Toys should be appropriate for your dog's size. Balls and other toys that are too small can easily be swallowed or become lodged in your dog's throat. Avoid or alter any toys that aren't "dog-proof" by removing ribbons, strings, eyes or other parts that could be chewed or ingested. Discard toys that start to break into pieces or have pieces torn-off. You should also avoid "tug-of-war" games with dogs that have dominant personalities (such games between dogs are usually fine).

Ask your veterinarian which rawhide toys are safe and which aren't. Unless your veterinarian says otherwise, "chewies" like hooves, pig's ears and rawhides should only be played with under your supervision. Very hard rubber toys are safer and last longer.

Take note of any toy that contains a "squeaker" buried in its center. Your dog may feel that he must find and destroy the source of the squeaking, and he could ingest it, in which case squeaking objects should also be used only under your supervision.

Recommended Toys

Active Toys

- Very hard rubber toys, such as Nylabone® - and Kong® -type products are available in a variety of shapes and sizes, and are fun for chewing and carrying around.
- "Rope" toys are usually available in a "bone" shape, with knotted ends.
- Tennis balls make great dog toys, but keep an eye out for any that could be chewed-through and discard them.

Distraction Toys

- The Kong-type toys, especially when filled with broken-up treats – or even better, broken-up treats and peanut butter – can keep a puppy or dog busy for hours. Only by chewing diligently can your dog get to the treats, and then only in small bits. Double-check with your veterinarian about whether or not you should give peanut butter to your dog. Be sure to choose a Kong-type toy of appropriate size for your dog.
- "Busy Box" toys are large rubber cubes with hiding places for treats. Only by moving the cube around with his nose, mouth and paws can your dog get to the goodies.

Comfort Toys

- Soft stuffed toys are good for several purposes but aren't appropriate for all dogs. For some dogs, the stuffed toy should be small enough to carry around. For dogs that want to shake or "kill" the toy, the toy should be the size that "prey" would be for that size dog (mouse-size, rabbit-size, or duck-size).
- Dirty laundry, such as an old t-shirt, pillowcase, towel or blanket can be very comforting to a dog, especially if the item smells like you. However, be forewarned that such an item could be destroyed by industrious fluffing, carrying, and nosing.

Get the Most Out of Toys!

- Rotate your dog's toys weekly by making only a few toys available at a time. Keep a variety of types easily accessible. If your dog has a favorite, like a soft "baby," you may want to leave it out all the time.
 - Provide toys that offer variety—at least one toy to carry, one to "kill," one to roll, and one to "baby."
- Hide-and-seek is a fun game for dogs. "Found" toys are often much more attractive than a toy which is obviously introduced. Making an interactive game out of finding toys or treats is a good "rainy-day" activity for your dog, using up energy without the need for a lot of space.
 - Many of your dog's toys should be interactive. Interactive play is very important for your dog because he needs active "people time"—and such play also enhances the bond between you and your pet. By focusing on a specific task—such as repeatedly returning a ball, Kong or Frisbee, or playing hide-and-seek with treats or toys—your dog can expel pent-up mental and physical energy in a limited amount of time and space. This greatly reduces stress due to confinement, isolation, and boredom. For young, high-energy, and untrained dogs, interactive play also offers an opportunity for socialization and helps them learn about appropriate and inappropriate behavior, such as jumping up or being mouthy.



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