

Expert Advice from the Trainer

To Chew and What Not to Chew

by Siobhan Reilly

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Dogs entertain themselves and relieve stress by chewing, so it is important that we teach them which things can and cannot be chewed. Chewing on inappropriate items can cause a lot of problems for your pooch from choking to intestinal obstructions.

The first step toward fixing an inappropriate chewing problem is to purchase, at least, 10 hard rubber, plastic or bone toys, which your dog cannot chew into pieces. These toys will be his chew toys. Any toys that can be chewed into bits are not appropriate to be given to your pup because they can be hazardous and also encourage your pup to be destructive.

Next we need to teach him that these toys are fun and to be played with. Do this by spending 10-minute sessions playing with these toys with him as many times a day as you can. Praise and encourage him every time he puts a toy in his mouth and activate the toy by throwing it and moving it around. Whenever your pup is in his crate put several chew toys in with him. Many of them are designed to contain treats. When you stuff these toys with treats, your pup will teach himself to play with them while he is alone in his crate.

Do not give him the opportunity to chew your things. Make sure an adult is watching him anytime he is running loose in the house or outside. This way you will see him the moment he picks up something inappropriate; a loud "no" and stomping on the floor should get him to drop it. Once he's dropped it, do not pick it up. We want him to learn to leave things alone even when they are sitting on the floor. If he tries to pick it up again, say "no" again. Meanwhile anytime he picks up a toy, stop what you are doing and lavish him with praise.

If you find yourself correcting your pup for picking up the wrong things many times a day then you need to spend more time teaching him to play with toys and less time letting him run around in the house. It is important that he has a clear idea of what we want him to do and what we want him to chew, before we spend too much time telling him what we don't want him to do. ■