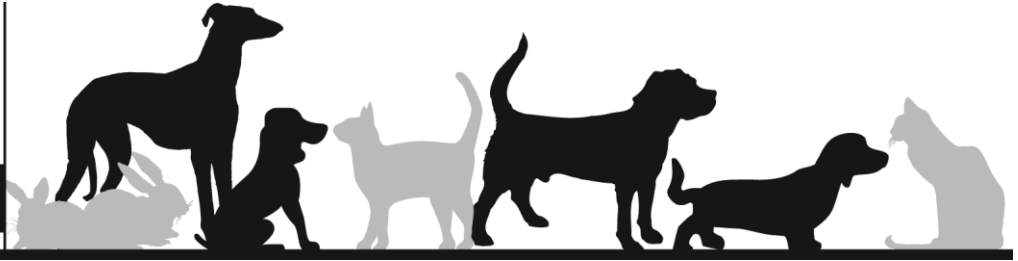




DOGS



Dog Toys And How To Use Them

Dog toys can provide fun, mental stimulation, and exercise for your dog. By focusing on a specific task, like 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/or 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 with people and with other animals, like jumping up or being mouthy.

It's your job to ensure that the toys you give your dog are safe and appropriate for that particular dog. This can depend on factors such as your dog's size, activity level and personal preference. Although we can't guarantee your dog's enthusiasm or his safety with any specific toy, we can offer the following guidelines.

What to Watch Out For

- ◆ Don't let your dog use household objects as toys. The things that are usually the most attractive to dogs are often the very things that are the most dangerous. Dog-proof your home by checking for: string, ribbon, rubber bands, children's toys, pantyhose and anything else that could be ingested.
- ◆ Toys should be appropriate for your dog's current size. Balls and other toys that are too small can easily be swallowed or become lodged in your dog's mouth or throat.
- ◆ Avoid or alter any toys that aren't "dog-proof" by removing ribbons, strings, eyes or other parts that could be chewed and/or ingested. Discard any toy that starts to break into pieces or have pieces torn off. Also take note of any toy that contains a "squeaker" buried in its center. Your dog may feel that he must find and destroy the squeak-source and could ingest it, in which case squeaking objects should be "supervision only" toys.
- ◆ "Chewies" like hooves, pig's ears and rawhides, should be supervision-only goodies. Very hard rubber toys are safer and last longer. Use particular caution with toys you leave with a crated dog. Make sure the toy can hold up to your dog's level of chewing (some dogs can even chew a black Kong to pieces) and inspect the toys frequently for damage, particularly for pieces that are about to come off.
- ◆ With plush toys, watch for problem fillings like nutshells and polystyrene beads. Remember that soft toys are not indestructible and that even "safe" fillings shouldn't be eaten. Soft toys should be machine washable.

Toys We Recommend

- ◆ Very hard rubber toys, like Nylabone-type products and Kong-type products, are fun for chewing and for carrying around. Make sure to get the right size for your dog.
- ◆ Rope toys that are usually available in a "bone" shape with knotted ends.
- ◆ Kong-type toys, especially when filled with broken-up treats or, even better, a mixture of broken-up treats and peanut butter (we recommend natural peanut butter without added sugar or fillers). The right size Kong can keep a puppy or dog busy for hours. Only by working diligently can your dog access the treats, and then only in small bits - very rewarding! To make it last even longer, fill the Kong and freeze the filling before giving it to your dog.

Double-check with your veterinarian about whether or not you should give peanut butter to your dog.

- ◆ "Busy-box" or "puzzle" toys are large rubber cubes or other shapes with hiding places for treats. Only by manipulating the toy with his nose, mouth and paws, can your dog access the goodies.
- ◆ 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, it should be the size that "prey" would be for that size dog (mouse-size, rabbit-size or duck-size).
- ◆ Dirty laundry, like an old t-shirt, pillowcase, towel or blanket, can be very comforting to a dog, especially if it smells like you! Be forewarned that the item could be destroyed by industrious fluffing, carrying and nosing.

How to Get the Most Out of Toys

- ◆ Join in when your dog plays with his toys! Interactive play is very important for your dog because he needs active "people time."
- ◆ Rotate your dog's toys weekly by making only four or five toys available at a time. Keep a variety of types easily accessible. If your dog has a huge favorite, like a soft "baby," you should probably leave it out all the time.
- ◆ Provide toys that offer a variety of uses - 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 to play. "Found" toys are often much more attractive than a toy which is blatantly 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.

For more information on behavior and training for dogs and cats, please visit our web site at www.sspca.org/pet-carebehavior/.