

Dog Toys

By Sherry Woodard

Dogs who have their own toys are less likely to be attracted to children's toys, or to use household items – such as the garden hose or your favorite shoes – as toys. Most dogs love to play with toys, but just like humans, they get bored with the same old thing. So, get your dog a variety of fun and interesting toys to play with. The toys you buy should be appropriate for the size, strength, activity level and interest of your dog.

For safety, you should watch how your dog uses (or rather, abuses) his toys. Some dogs will keep a soft toy forever without “killing” it. Other dogs will gleefully destroy their toys – it's all part of the fun. But, it could be dangerous if parts of the toy become lodged in the dog's mouth or throat, or are ingested. Wood and plastic can become lodged in gum tissue, causing painful injuries and infections that may require medical attention. If ingested, the toy parts can create blockages in the dog's intestines, and surgery may be needed to remove the blockage.



Please replace all dangerous items with appealing safe toys. Some examples of safe toys are Nylabones and Kongs. Nylabones are hard rubber chew toys that come in a variety of sizes and flavors. Kong-type toys, which come in a variety of shapes, are great fun – you can stuff them, freeze food in them, and hide them for a game of seek. Puzzle toys (Buster Cubes are one example) are also entertaining, safe toys that keep your dog occupied for a while. When the dog rolls the cube, treats fall out at random.

If you have toys that are not dog-safe – for instance, stuffed animals that have ribbons, plastic eyes and other parts that may be chewed off – you can sometimes make them safe by removing the offending parts. Check what the stuffing is made of, too, since some toys contain sharp pieces of nut shells or plastic beads that your dog could ingest. If the toy has a squeaker inside, many dogs feel compelled to remove the noise-making item. Dogs who tend to be destructive with toys should only play with these toys under supervision. Take the toys away if you are leaving the dog alone. Check all toys periodically for wear and tear.

Rubber balls and tennis balls are often favorite fetch toys. But, never throw them hard and fast toward the dog for her to catch – they may become lodged in the back of her mouth or throat. If your dog is extra large, you will need balls that are larger than tennis balls. Some dogs like to chase after rocks, but don't use rocks as fetch toys, since they can wear down and even break your dog's teeth.

If your dog loves chewing, you could try giving him Red Barn bully sticks or chipped rawhide. Again, though, watch him at first. Some dogs are so enthusiastic that they swallow without enough chewing, which could cause choking. Any product can be

dangerous – watch your dog so you'll be aware of his habits and preferences, and know how to keep him safe and busy.

To get the most fun out of toys, keep some hidden away and trade a few out every week or so. That way, your dog will think she's getting a constant supply of new toys. Play hide-and-seek with toys. At first, you may need to teach your dog to seek, but most dogs love the game once they get the idea. If you have a place in the yard where digging is encouraged (a dirt box, for instance), you can bury toys there for your dog to find. And don't forget good old-fashioned fetch and Frisbee-playing with your dog.

Playing with your dog enhances both of your lives – the interaction provides exercise, stress relief, comic relief and bonding opportunities.

Sherry Woodard is the dog training and care consultant at Best Friends. She develops resources and provides consulting services nationally to help achieve Best Friends' No More Homeless Pets mission.

See also: Fun Things to Do with Your Dog