

DESTRUCTIVE DOGGIES

Most puppies have a strong, natural desire to investigate and chew. But this desire can be a major problem if your puppy digs up your roses or destroys your new shoes. Many owners rely solely on punishment to correct problem chewing or digging, but you'll find that reinforcing good behavior works better and keeps your dog happier. You can do this easily by giving your puppy a place where he can explore and investigate and by giving him safe, interesting chew toys. Plenty of play and exercise is a must for your puppy, since unused energy contributes to his desire to search and destroy.

Chew Toys

When selecting chew toys, begin with a variety of toys to determine which type your pup prefers. Just as children enjoy playing with new and novel items, you may find your puppy prefers to play with your possessions over his own toys. Rotate different toys every few days to keep them interesting. When you see your pup chewing his toys, reward him with affection or a bit of puppy food. Toys made of sheet rawhide, nylon, and durable rubber are most practical. Some toys are designed so you can stuff food into the openings. Others can be dipped in broth or covered with a small amount of food spread. This will increase your puppy's interest in the toys and will extend the length of time he stays occupied.

Preventing Problems

Even with an excellent selection of appealing chew toys, many household items may still be more inviting. Until you can trust your dog, supervise him or confine him to a safe area, such as his dog crate or exercise pen. Never give items to your puppy to chew that are similar to household items you don't want destroyed. For example, your puppy may not distinguish between old and new shoes. As your puppy grows older and is allowed more freedom around the home, it's likely that your puppy may slip up and attempt to munch on items you want him to avoid. Some puppies can be taught to avoid these items if you make them taste bad. Use commercial antichew sprays, citronella oil, booby traps, or a small amount of cayenne pepper mixed with water as deterrents.

Punishment for chewing is not a good solution since it can cause your puppy to fear you. At best, it may only teach him not to chew the items when you're watching. Tugging on a head halter with a ten-foot leash is an appropriate way to immediately interrupt chewing.

Anxiety

Destructive behavior is often a direct response to anxiety, not your dog's attempt to get even with you. Extreme anxiety and destructiveness during your absence may require an in-depth consultation with your veterinarian or behaviorist. Lessen the problem by teaching your dog that he cannot receive attention on demand. Train him to rest and sleep in his own bed or crate, rather than constantly lying near you. Exercise your dog before you leave home, and try to sneak out when he is occupied. Practice short departures, then gradually increase the length of time that your dog is alone.

Digging

Dogs dig for a number of reasons: to cool off, chase rodents, bury and retrieve bones, escape confinement, or just for the fun of it. Digging commonly occurs when pets are left alone with insufficient stimulation. Provide your dog with stimulating chew toys, increased play and exercise, and perhaps even a second pet. Of course, give some extra thought to the addition of a second pet, since you could end up with two diggers instead of one.

Digging can be suppressed in your presence by punishment. However, unless you identify and address the cause, the digging will continue in your absence. Try these methods to discourage digging: remote punishment (turning on a sprinkler, pulling on an extended leash, tossing a tin can containing a few pebbles) or changing/covering the surface (placing chicken wire or rocks over the area or covering with concrete). For some dogs the most practical solution is to provide a digging area. Build an eight-inch-deep wood frame and sink it into the ground. Mix the soil with sand and partially bury toys (smear a small amount of cheese or meat juice on the exposed ends). Occasionally give your dog food treats to reinforce appropriate digging.

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