

Destructive chewing and digging

Choose the right toys

1. Select toys that are appealing but safe. Find textures and scents that are attractive to your dog and maintain interest. Play toys should be big enough that they cannot be swallowed. If the toy may be damaged by chewing make certain it is not harmful or toxic if swallowed; otherwise closely supervise its use. Raw-hide pieces should be large enough for the puppy to gnaw; rolled or flat sheets may be preferable to sticks or pieces with knots that might cause problems if swallowed.
2. Choose toys that maintain the dog's interest as long as possible such as those that can be coated, stuffed, or filled with food to maintain interest. Toys can last considerably longer if the chews are attached to the toy or can be stuffed tightly inside. Dental treats and dental foods are healthy for the teeth and may prolong chewing.
3. Change toys, rotate through them, or fill with treats or food to maintain interest.
4. Choose toys that are not similar to your possessions (e.g., old shoes, towels, or clothes).
5. Use praise and affection, or occasionally toss a small treat to the puppy for chewing on its toys.
6. Many toys are designed to be coated, stuffed, or filled with food treats to be self-rewarding when chewed. Freezing the toys with food stuffed inside may extend the duration of chewing and play. Toys such as Buster Cube, Tricky Treat, Crazy Ball, Twist'n Treat or Kibble nibble are designed to be filled with food or treats and manipulated to deliver the contents slowly and encourage the pet to work for its food.

Encourage exploratory play

Food can be hidden throughout the environment to encourage exploratory behavior.

Provide a regular regime of social play

1. Engaging in regular activities with your dog provides social, physical, and mental enrichment as well as structure and routine. Social activities might include walking or jogging, retrieving games such as Frisbee, or playing ball, swimming, or more intense activities such as flyball, herding trials, or agility to meet the needs of high-energy individuals and working breeds. Obedience training provides quality time with the family, while teaching new tasks.
2. Tug games can be an energetic form of social interaction and oral stimulation. Toys should be durable and designed for games of tug, and should not include your possessions. Train your dog to release the toy using treats or another toy as rewards during play. Be sure the pet shows no toy aggression before beginning tug games. If the dog will not give up the toy and becomes possessive or aggressive, cease tug games and seek guidance from a qualified behaviorist if possessive behavior continues.
3. Dogs with good social skills with other dogs can benefit from play sessions in your yard or at the park.

Preventing and deterring undesirable chewing

1. Even if your dog has sufficient exercise, play, and chew toys, it may still explore, steal, or chew household possessions. Be sure to supervise and prevent it from getting to objects or locations where damage might arise (e.g., barricades, crate training, dog-proofing).
2. Potential targets of chewing might be made less appealing by spraying with aversive-tasting substances or using avoidance devices such as motion-activated alarms or spray devices.
3. If you catch your dog in the act of chewing on something inappropriate, immediately interrupt the behavior with a sharp noise or a pull on a leash. Then, direct the dog's focus to proper chew toys and reward with praise or a treat. However, even if you catch and interrupt your pet when chewing inappropriate items, it may only learn to avoid chewing these items in your presence.
4. Never punish after the act, never use physical punishment, and never use any correction that causes the pet to be anxious or avoid you.

Chewing and anxiety

1. Chewing and destructiveness may also arise in response to anxiety and should not be considered as an attempt to “get even with you.” Anxiety could be due to distress about being separated from the family (separation anxiety), noise or storm phobias, and high arousal or anxiety when people or other animals come on to the property. Treatment to reduce underlying anxiety generally requires a consultation with a qualified behaviorist to determine the cause of the problem and develop an appropriate treatment program.

Digging

1. First determine why the dog is digging to develop an appropriate treatment program.
2. Dogs that dig as a form of play or exploration should be provided with greater enrichment and structure in the form of scheduled social play, exercise, and training, by providing toys for chewing and play, or by leaving the dog with a social partner when leaving the pet outdoors (see Chewing, above).
3. If the dog is digging to escape, the fencing will need to be made more secure and avoidance units that activate a spray collar may be added. However, if the pet has previously escaped and the reason for escape attempts is not addressed, the dog may try even harder. Consider blocking sights or sounds, providing a dog house for increased security, and using reward training techniques to reduce fear and anxiety of noises, people or pets on the other side of the fence.
4. For pets digging holes to capture prey or dig a nest and cool off, consider confining the pet to a run or pen with shade and fresh water and provide a digging pit with sand or soil in a portion of the area. Burying toys or food in the digging pit can help encourage digging.
5. Regardless of the cause, digging can be prevented or interrupted by supervising outdoors. Commands such as “come” or “leave it” or keeping a long leash attached should be effective; however, the pet is likely to return to digging when you are not watching.
6. Avoidance training may be effective if the pet can be deterred while the owners are out of sight (e.g., remote spray collar, turning on the sprinkler) or with booby traps (motion-activated spray, alarm, or sprinkler) or deterrents placed in the area (e.g., rocks, gravel, or water in the hole, chicken wire, or fencing over the hole). However, some pets will just change to a new location.
7. Digging can be prevented when the owner cannot supervise by confining the dog to a secure run with gravel, patio stones, or a paved surface. Give feeding and chew toys in the area to provide enrichment opportunities.