

# Boredom Busting Toys

How do you know if you're the owner of a "destructive dog"? It's simple. The first thing you do every time you get home is a lap of the house and yard to see what destruction has been wrought whilst you were away. Or, after realising that your dog has been quiet for far too long, you experience that sinking feeling of knowing that they must be up to no good!



## Destructive Behaviour Reasons

Even in the back yard, dogs can become destructive, damaging bushes or chewing on hose attachments, sticks, bark and rocks. Any vet will share stories of strange objects found in a dog's stomach or throat and of mouth infections caused through splinters from chewed up sticks. This behaviour, in its most severe form can lead to terrible injuries and even unfortunate fatalities.

Although the results might be destructive, the reason for the behaviour is quite varied. Dogs will always have the natural desire to hunt, forage and chase and so quickly become bored when left alone all day with nothing to do. They find ways to release their own pent up energy if they don't get a chance to do this on a morning run down the park and then, of course, there are those that simply enjoy the feeling of chewing, biting and tearing.

## Dealing with Destructive Behaviour

Dealing with a dog with destructive tendencies is a many pronged approach. Plenty of exercise in the morning or just before you leave home will help to get rid of any pent up energy and perhaps encourage them to sleep or at least laze around until you return. Working on separation anxiety issues is also important and, funnily enough, so is a trip to the vet to ensure that infected teeth aren't causing the dog to want to chew to relieve the pain. Providing stimulating activities for the dog when left alone, so that they don't have time to be bored or destructive, is key to ensuring that the house and garden will be the same when you return as when you left.

Although smart, dogs can't always tell the difference between a toy and a shoe. In fact, some dog toys even look like shoes and often, when they are puppies, we laugh as we encourage



them to fetch slippers or pull socks off feet! No wonder they think it's ok to chew on a shoe or grab a thong, especially if it smells like their beloved owner. Encouraging the dog to play with objects that they won't be allowed to as an adult is only making a rod for your own back so it's best to provide them with toys of their own.

## Boredom Busting Toys

It's inevitable that a dog will have to spend some time on their own but it doesn't mean that they can't be left with things to do that are interesting and fun.

Boredom busting toys come in three categories:

- those that the dog spends hours on to destroy such as stuffed toys;
- those that they love to chew or play with such as rubber, rope, plastic and nylabone toys;
- and those that the dog has to work at to get a reward such as a treat ball.

Each has an important part to play in keeping a bored dog stimulated and mixing them up and swapping them around will add to the enjoyment that the dog feels.

## Toys to Destroy

Providing a soft toy to a destructive dog might seem like an odd thing to do but in fact it is satisfying its need to pull something apart that, if they didn't get this from a dog toy, they would get it from your slippers, your child's favourite bear or their own bed.



Dogs love to work on a soft toy for many hours until they finally de-stuff it and possibly decapitate it and then lovingly carry it around for many months. How disappointing it must be then when owners throw out these beloved toys just when the dogs have them just the way they wanted them!

It is absolutely vital to choose toys that are safe for dogs, knowing that it will probably be ripped apart. Soft toys chosen for dogs should not have small, hard objects such as button eyes, bells or metal squeakers that they can swallow, so many kids' toys and even cat toys will not be suitable.

## Toys to Chew

Obviously puppies love to chew to help them exercise their new teeth but many adult dogs never grow out of this need. The action of chewing helps to clean their teeth, massage their gums and exercise their jaw so, providing that they are chewing on something safe, this practice doesn't need to be discouraged.

There are all sorts of toys available to help with 'mouthy' dogs that enjoy tearing and chewing from the thick ropes and dumbbells which have a textured surface that feels good in the mouth and are fun to carry; to those that are smooth but tough and can cope with continual chewing.

Nylabone toys are quite firm to the touch and whilst they will eventually be demolished, in the process they rub against the teeth and the gums helping with oral hygiene.



Dental sticks, pigs' ears and rawhide are daily treats that require the dog to work hard at but which also have a smell and flavour that gets their attention quickly. These are useful to give as part of the 'leaving the house' routine as the dog will soon settle down on their bed for a good chew whilst you head off to work. They provide a positive distraction to help with separation anxiety.

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Chew toys that last are important but can seem expensive; but then so are your favourite shoes. Quality chew toys are available in various grades of toughness with some 'extreme' versions built for the most destructive animals including the lions and tigers at the zoo. Look for toys that suit the dog's breed and size to ensure that they will get enjoyment for a very long time.



### Toys to Reward

Whilst these toys are essentially built for chewing, the great thing about them is that they keep a dog busy for hours whilst they work for the reward of the treats inside. How can a dog be bored if they're working for a food reward? Remember though to compensate for the food reward that they receive from the treats when dishing up their dinner at night.

There are several well known brands of 'reward toys' available and within these ranges are all sorts of designs and sizes to suit any size and breed dog.

The classic designs are made from a hard rubber and have a hole in the centre in which different treats are pushed. There are a few tricks to filling the centres of these toys to make the treats last longer and to really challenge the dog. Use a combination of different size and shaped treats including dry biscuits, liver balls and snack bones pushing them in really tightly then crosshatch strips of jerky to hold it all in making sure that they are secured under the 'lip' of the toy. By having them very secure, the dog will have to use a number of techniques to get its reward including bouncing the toy and digging in with their tongue. All the time that your dog is doing this, they're not digging holes or destroying much-loved family items.



There are other shaped toys with ridges inside and out into which a flavour-paste is spread. Jerky can be pushed into these as well and although these might be a bit messy for indoors, they provide hours of pleasure for the dog as they lick, chew and gnaw at them in the backyard throughout the day.



Wobblers are really fun for dogs that are just that bit more intelligent. These have a round base and are weighted in a similar way to those old punching clowns that we had as kids many years ago. These toys are loaded with yummy treats and when they are pushed, they bounce right back up releasing a reward for the dog to enjoy. These are tough toys so they can withstand being chewed on and bounced around by an over-enthusiastic dog.

