

Chewing

Often when we talk about dogs' needs, we stop one step short of the truth. For instance, everyone talks about a dog's need to chew. But the truth is, dogs do not have a need to chew, they have a need to dissect prey and extract valuable nutrients. Chewing is merely the means to that end, not an end in itself. If dogs in their natural habitat did not gnaw into bones to extract marrow, they would be wasting a valuable resource.

Your job is to teach your dog which things are acceptable to chew and which are not. This requires constant supervision in the early stages of your dog's life. Those familiar with raising a toddler know the rule: supervise or confine. If you cannot watch your puppy every minute, then confine her. If she is not confined then watch her and redirect her the instant she picks up an item she should not.

You must catch your dog in the act of chewing an inappropriate object and redirect her to an appropriate chew item. Punishing your dog for chewing your shoe 5 hours (or even 5 minutes) after the fact does not work!!! Your dog cannot make the connection between something she *was* doing and something you are *now* doing. If your dog chews up something of yours, then it is your fault for not supervising her.

To help you in your efforts to teach your dog right from wrong, you may come to rely on the use of various scented deterrents. Be aware: you must condition your dog to be repelled by these products. Most of them are alcohol based and evaporate very quickly, leaving only a faint odor and taste. If you merely apply these to the edge of your priceless Persian rug, you may inadvertently teach your dog to tolerate the taste. Follow the directions on these products very carefully. Most require you to give your dog repeated, undiluted doses directly into the mouth or up her nostrils.

Because your dog has an innate need to chew, it is vital that you offer plentiful and palatable alternatives to the items you are going to keep off limits.

Recommended chew toys:

- Frozen Kong toy stuffed with various foods and frozen (peanut butter, yogurt, cheese, dog biscuits, etc)
- Various types of bones. Stay away from small bones, of course, and any bones that splinter.
- Dish towel soaked in chicken broth and frozen
- An old sock stuffed with kibble and tied in a knot. We have found that dogs especially enjoy this because it mimics the dissection of prey.