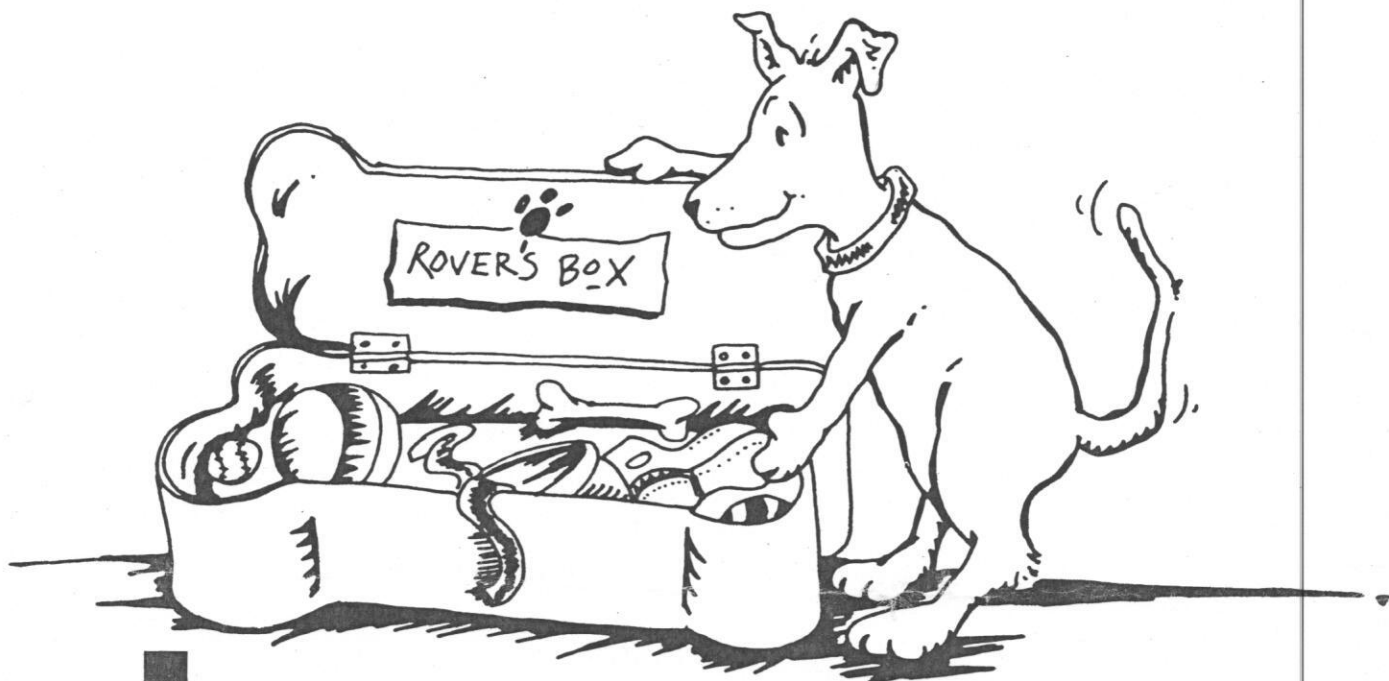


# Chewing

*Better Homes & Dogs*



It is important to see things from your dog's point of view and realize that chewing is a normal and necessary dog behavior. Puppies chew to ease the pain of teething. Older dogs that have no previous history of destruction may suddenly start chewing because of dental problems (a trip to the vet will usually take care of this). Dogs, especially puppies, discover their environment with their paws and jaws. Investigation may lead to play and chewing continues because it is fun. If uncontrolled, chewing simply becomes a habit.

## Holistic Approach

There are some general reasons why a dog resorts to misbehavior. Primarily, the dog is bored or has too much energy and nothing to do with it. Take time to schedule daily exercise and play sessions with your dog. A happy, well-exercised dog is more likely to sleep contentedly all day long and less likely to engage in destructive chewing. Regular walks, play sessions and training not only provide exercise but also help to improve general communication between you

and your dog. This makes communicating about specific problems easier.

The chapters on barking and digging describe some games and activities you and your dog might enjoy. In addition, there are some general and obvious things you can do to make your life and your dog's life easier. Keep your shoes in the closet and keep the closet door closed. Store the trash can in a place the dog can't enter. Don't tempt and torment your dog by making it too easy for him to get into trouble. Remember, training is setting the dog up to get things right so he can be rewarded and praised.

## Reward

Whether trying to prevent or cure a chewing problem, the single most important item on the agenda is rewarding your dog for chewing appropriate objects. The first order of business then is to provide your dog with chewtoys, so that he has an appropriate and acceptable outlet for this important activity.

Buy several types of chewtoys and put them all on the floor to see which ones the dog likes. Then buy a couple dozen more of each favored brand. Put a few chewtoys in every room; one on every carpet; one near every piece of furniture and one near every closet door. Put several of them outside near patio furniture, hoses, plants, etc.

Simply dumping a whole bunch of chewtoys in front of your dog is not enough. Unfortunately, your dog cannot read the labels and therefore will not know what they are for. It is important to specifically train your dog to chew these items and these items alone. Before it is fair to reprimand your dog for chewing inappropriate articles, make sure that you have made it quite clear which articles you would like him to chew. Take the time to train your dog to chew on his chewtoys.

Always be on the alert to lavish your dog with praise each and every time that he approaches and starts playing with a chewtoy without your encouragement. Don't take this for granted. In addition, you may actively help your dog to redirect chewing activities to his own toys. Put his toys on the floor and praise him each time he sniffs, licks or chews them. Make the toys more tempting by wagging them around or slowly dragging one along the floor. Most importantly, train your dog to "find" his chewtoy. Hide it under his blanket, then tell him to go "find it." When he does so, reward him with lots of praise and affection and maybe a treat, then continue the game. The idea is to get your dog into the habit of looking for a toy even if one is not in view. Even though you may have placed several chewtoys in each room while preparing to leave, they have a tendency to disappear in no time at all.

It is usually a bad idea to use old shoes, clothing or household articles as chewtoys. Many dogs will eventually make the mistake of failing to discriminate between an old pair of shoes and a new pair of shoes.

Until your dog can be trusted not to destroy your belongings, he should not be given free run of the house when you are not home or when you can't watch him. He should temporarily be confined to an area littered with appropriate

toys. Since he will have no other choice of articles to chew, he'll learn to play with his own toys.

## Reprimand

If you catch your dog in the act of chewing a forbidden article, he should be reprimanded instantly. The reprimand should be short, sharp and instructive. Quickly shout, "OFF!" Then immediately (in a nice voice) ask him to "go find" his chewtoy. Repeat the instruction until he grabs hold of a chewtoy. He may need a little help from you in finding one. Once he has the chewtoy, praise and reward him.

This is a valuable learning experience for your dog. Within a couple of seconds, you have indicated that it is wrong for him to chew on carpets, but that it makes you very happy to see him chew his own toys. You have communicated that it is not the chewing behavior that you find objectionable, but rather his choice of item.

Booby traps can also be used to teach your dog what he should not chew. One useful booby trap is the combination of hot sauce plus a warning cue such as a perfume. Make the hot sauce by boiling chili pepper seeds in oil. Liberally paint the hot sauce on a favorite or recently chewed item such as underneath the corners of a carpet or on a chair leg. Then put a drop of diluted perfume on the top side of the carpet or at the bottom of the chair leg. Any inexpensive perfume diluted about 1 to 10 with water will work. You don't want your entire house to reek of perfume - you only want your dog with his keen senses to smell it. He will smell the scent, approach to investigate and eventually take a lick or chew. Usually this is a very quick lick or chew since he will be in immediate need of water! While your dog is dousing his tongue, clear off the hot sauce and spray the diluted perfume on other items of furniture or clothing.

Dogs can't read a sign that says "Danger, this is hot," but they can smell the perfume which warns them that the item is hot and they had better leave it alone. Every week or so you can spray the diluted perfume on your household items. Read the section on Booby Traps for more ideas.