

DESTRUCTIVE DOGS

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 out that reinforcing good behavior works better and keeps your dog happier. You can do this easily by giving your puppy a place where it can explore and investigate, and by giving it safe, interesting chew toys. Plenty of play and exercise is a must for your puppy, since unused energy contributes to its 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 like children enjoy playing with new and novel items, you may find your puppy prefers to play with your possessions over its own toys. Rotate different toys every few days to keep them interesting. When you see your pup chewing its toys, reward it 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 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 it 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 it or confine it to a safe area, such as its 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 it to avoid. Some puppies can be taught to avoid these items by making them taste bad. Use commercial anti-chew 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 it not to chew the items when you are 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 a behaviorist. Lessen the problem by teaching your dog that it cannot receive attention on demand. Train it to rest and sleep in its own bed or crate, rather than constantly lying near you. Exercise your dog before you leave home and try to sneak out when it 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.