

## **Destructive Chewing**

Dogs use their senses to explore the world around them. Chewing is one way to investigate the objects that intrigue them. They use their mouths to play and learn to hunt. Puppies start chewing as soon as their baby teeth erupt. Chewing gives a dog a satisfying way to curb hunger and boredom and is a healthy way to expend pent up energy. A rawhide or rubber toy may be just fine for Fido to chew on, but the dining room table legs and the couch cushions are off limits. A dog must be taught what is appropriate to chew on, and if inappropriate chewing occurs despite training, it may be a sign of separation anxiety, stress, or even disease.

A dog cannot distinguish between acceptable "chewables" and your expensive belongings. When a new dog is brought into the household, anything that is off limits for chewing should be picked up and out of reach. Children's toys and shoes are included. Never confuse a dog by giving him his own shoe or sock to chew. Dog toys should not resemble household items. Crate training is a very good method of teaching a dog a schedule so that boredom and anxiety do not cause him to become destructive. Boredom is the number one cause of destructive chewing. Give the dog plenty of attention and time to expend energy. High energy dogs like hunting and working breeds need a job to do in order to exercise their brains. Fetching a Frisbee or ball for a period of time every day can satisfy this need.

Give the dog many options of appropriate chew toys. Real bones are not healthy for dogs. Rawhides are a great alternative. Hard rubber toys that have a cavity on one end allow you to place a treat or smear a little peanut butter inside to keep the dog's interest.

Destructive chewing that suddenly begins with a well trained dog can be a sign that something is wrong. Separation anxiety can cause a dog to seek solace in chewing. The dog may chew the owner's belongings as a way to seek attention. Punishing the dog can negatively reinforce the bad behavior. The dog is not chewing to spite you. Cushing's disease can cause a dog to have a ravenous insatiable appetite that may lead to inappropriate chewing. A dog that suddenly begins destructive chewing should be examined by the veterinarian.