



Issue: Destructive Behavior

Dogs are natural scavengers and chewers- shredders and rippers! When bringing a new dog or puppy home, one of the best ways to prepare is to ensure that you have appropriate outlets for them to perform their natural behavior, expend energy and provide for their mental and physical wellbeing while in the home. There are a variety of tools you can use to engage your new pet at home.

Puzzle Feeders

One great way to occupy your pet's time and provide enrichment on a daily basis is by feeding their daily meals with puzzle feeders or puzzle toys. These range from simple bowl alternatives to complex toys that require high-level problem solving. The goals of a puzzle feeder are to increase the time it takes your dog to eat and to increase the effort required to obtain the food – both of these make eating a meal more satisfying for your dog. These are also ideal tools to help slow down pets that tend to eat their food too quickly. Examples are provided below, and all the tools can be purchased from most pet stores.

Kongs

Another common and helpful enrichment item for your pets is a Kong. These come in a variety of sizes and different levels of durability, from small, soft puppy Kongs to large, durable Kongs for heavy chewers. Kongs can be filled with peanut butter, wet food or any other appropriate foodstuff for dogs and can be frozen in advance of providing the enrichment. By freezing the Kong with soft material inside, your dog will have to work to get to their treats, expending energy and occupying them mentally and physically even when you are not there. You can also fill with dry kibble or treats and seal with peanut butter for another fun way to feed your dog their morning meal.

Apart from the classic Kong, there are other similar items that can be filled and frozen, made by Kong and by other companies. These can be found in most pet stores and from online shops.

Advanced Puzzles

Some dogs will figure out these simpler toys more quickly and may require enrichment with added difficulty. For these pets there are lots of options, from toys like a Kong Wobbler (below, far right), which requires the dog to move the item around significantly to retrieve the treats, to true puzzle toys with door flaps or moving parts with hidden treats inside. Some examples are provided below, but these come in all different shapes, sizes and difficulty levels.

Do-It-Yourself (DIY) Toys

One of the most simple and cost effective ways to provide enrichment for your pet is to simply use empty cardboard boxes, paper towel tubes or cardboard egg cartons. For those dogs that tend to be destructive, this is a healthy and inexpensive way to expend their energy and channel their desire to shred! You can fill the boxes or cardboard tubes with treats or dry kibble, and can add in peanut butter if you want. Then simply seal up the box or tube and give it to your dog. Be aware that your dogs will leave some degree of mess when they shred the box, but the enjoyment your dog receives should far outweigh the clean-up. Once your dog understands the game, you can get creative, providing more complex or larger boxes, or putting boxes inside boxes! Have fun!

Heavy Chewers

Our heavy chewing dogs can also benefit from durable chew toys like Nylabones and other appropriate hard plastic toys, but may also enjoy edible chews such as pigs' ears, rawhides, deer antlers, bully sticks or cow hooves. Please ensure that these are natural and of good quality, as some knotted or braided rawhide items are bleached, sealed with glue or treated with chemicals that may not be safe for our pets. As always, read labels carefully and opt for the most natural option available.

Note: If your dog is only destroying items in your home when you are out of the house, they may be experiencing separation anxiety. This is a behavior that is manageable and treatable.

Please see our "**Separation Anxiety**" handout to learn more about ways to help your dog cope with your absence.

If you need more help:

Seek out a consultation with a professional, certified behaviorist or a certified dog trainer.

Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers: <http://www.ccpdt.org>

Certified Applied Animal Behaviorists: <http://corecaab.org>