

Dig It

how to stop your dog chewing and digging

BY JESS ALLSOP

chewing

Chewing is an essential part of being a puppy, and as a responsible new parent it's your job to show your pup what it's allowed to chew. Pups need to chew in order to maintain healthy teeth and gums, as well as to keep them amused. What else do you expect your puppy to do when you are not around to play with them? Sit down and read a book, watch some television? We all know that's not going to happen; instead puppies like good physical games such as chewing, chasing and digging.

Expect an increase in chewing during teething at approximately five months of age, and during morning and afternoon activity peaks. Confining your puppy when unattended, and redirection to playing with appropriate toys is the key to success. Entertainment is also vital, as bored dogs will entertain themselves in ways that are sometimes inappropriate! Plenty of exercise, outings and doggy friends to play with should fill in your puppy's day.

If your pup picks up an unsuitable item to chew on, ask it to 'leave' and replace the item with one of its toys. If your pup is an insatiable chewer consider investing in some heavy-duty toys that can be stuffed with food. Putting tidbits of food inside chew toys focuses your puppy's chewing activities on those toys instead of on unacceptable objects. Actively encourage chewing of the preferred items and spend time playing with these toys, as pups always love a bit of 'live bait'.

The financial outlay of good quality toys will easily pay off in the long run when your carpets, shoes and furniture legs are all saved from destruction. During the hotter months stuff Kongs or other hollow toys with moistened food and place them in the freezer overnight. Feeding your puppies from these will keep them both entertained and cool throughout long hot days. Alternatively, smear some cottage cheese or peanut butter inside the toys.

digging

Being a dog is all about having fun in Mum and Dad's garden. Consider it a dog's primal form of entertainment, so don't be a killjoy and have a blanket rule of no digging. Instead, encourage your dog to dig in appropriate places. Dedicate an area of the garden or even a sandpit entirely to your dog's entertainment!

When pup starts to dig in the garden redirect them to the 'special' spot and bury a stuffed Kong or bone just under the surface. Encourage pup to dig it up and make a huge fuss when it does so. Soon your pup will satisfy its digging craving by going to the outdoor treasure chest.

Dogs that are left outside during the day can have their daily food ration hidden underground – a great form of environmental enrichment. Fence off non-doggy areas in the garden and let your dog know that these are no-go zones by spending plenty of time in the garden with your puppy and saying commands such as 'off the garden' when it enters forbidden areas. Remember to always praise your pup when it actually does the right thing, too!

For dogs that insist on digging in forbidden areas in the garden, even when they've been offered more suitable options, bury a blown-up balloon in the hole and lightly cover it with soil (don't let your pup watch you do this). When your pup re-digs in the banned area the balloon will pop and give it a fright. Alternatively, hide from your pup and have a sprinkler set up next to the troublesome area. When it enters the forbidden area, turn on the hose. The lesson learned will be 'stay away from this area of the garden as there are strange monsters there!'

Be aware that these methods will only work if your dog does not like popping balloons or being squirted with water! Just remember that it is your job as a dedicated caregiver to teach your pup right from wrong, and to always reward good behaviour – don't just get cross when he makes mistakes – then you will have a puppy that happily wants and knows how to please you. 🐾

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