



Destructive Chewing

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Chewing is a perfectly normal behavior for dogs. Dogs love to chew on bones and sticks and just about anything else available. They chew for fun, they chew for stimulation and exercise, and they chew to relieve anxiety.

But that's not it on the list of destructive behaviors. Dogs also steal things off the counters and tabletops, and they raid the trash. Most dogs prefer human food to dog food and, if given the opportunity, will help themselves. While these behaviors are normal, dogs can, of course, be taught to control themselves. Understand that your dog needs to be taught not to chew your things or steal your food—he's not born knowing that he shouldn't.

What to do:

- Provide the dog with plenty of his own toys and chew bones; introduce something new every day or two.
- Give the dog a "single serving" chew bone once or twice a day—something he will finish in one chew session (i.e., Greenie, Dentabone, etc.)
- Identify the times of the day when your dog is likely to chew, and give him a stuffed Kong, Goodie Ship, or Buster Cube at this time. You can include some of his daily ration of food in the toy.
- Discourage chewing inappropriate items with chewing deterrents, such as Bitter Apple or Chew Guard*
- Always supervise your dog. If you see him licking or chewing an item he shouldn't, say "uh uh," remove the item from his mouth and insert something that he can chew. Be sure to praise him.
- Booby-trap the counters and tables to discourage the dog from jumping up. You can try double-sided sticky tape, cookie sheets placed precariously so they fall down if the dog touches them and a pyramid of empty soda cans all tied together and placed so that they fall if the dog touches them (you can tie to a small tidbit of food to this contraption). You can also place "baits" to be stolen: food adulterated with bad-tasting substances, such as Tabasco or Bitter Apple.

What NOT to do:

- Do not show the dog the damage and spank, scold, or punish him after the fact.
- Do not crate the dog for lengthy periods of time to prevent destructive chewing.

* Using taste deterrents: When you first use the deterrent, apply a small amount to a piece of tissue or cotton wool. Place it directly into the dog's mouth, allow him to taste it and then spit it out. The dog has learned the link between the taste and the odor of the substance and will be more likely to avoid chewing items that smell like the substance. Re-apply the deterrent to the off-limits objects every day for 2-4 weeks.

For AAWL adopters who need more information or if you have additional questions, please call our Behavior Helpline at 602-273-6852 ext. 124.