

Behavior Solutions: Chewing

Every one of your socks has a hole, your furniture has recently acquired a frayed, rustic look, and your floor is constantly littered with the shredded remains of once recognizable household items. Did I bring home a dog or a beaver, you ask yourself. Chewing is a normal pastime for dogs, but it can be an annoying, and even dangerous habit when items around the house go through indiscriminate taste-testing. With some patience and persistence your home can be one without teeth marks.

Why Dogs Chew

Chewing is a natural behavior in dogs of all kinds, domestic and wild; large and small. It can be relaxing for them when they are stressed and something to occupy them when they are bored. Since dogs lack hands to enable them to pick up and investigate things around them, they often will use their mouths to inspect something that strikes their curiosity.

Teething, when puppies lose their temporary milk teeth to be replaced with permanent adult teeth, occurs around the ages of three to six months. Chewing, and particularly on cold items, helps to soothe tender gums and mouths during this stage.

Owners sometimes inadvertently reinforce chewing behaviors by paying attention to the offending dog. Chasing him through the house until he gives the item up or playing tug-of-war to get the item back equals fun to a bored dog and will encourage the behavior to continue. With a little prevention, this annoying behavior never has to become a habit that gnaws at you.

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Choosing What to Chew

Preventing inappropriate chewing and supplying your dog with items of his own to chew on from the very beginning can save you much time and money in the long run. This means dog-proof your home and take responsibility for your own belongings. Keep all items you would not want in your dog's mouth put away where he cannot get to them; keep cabinets closed; pick up dangerous or poisonous items (plants included); keep the trash covered or in a place he can't get to it; and wrap, cover, or hide electrical wires. Do not give your dog old shoes, or toys that are similar to your children's, as he will not know the difference between his old chewed sneaker and your new one. Provide your dog with chew toys like Starmark's Everlasting Treats™ and the Everlasting Treat Ball™. The Everlasting Treats™ can be used alone or inside a treat or food filled treat ball to keep your dog's mouth happily occupied.

Remember, your dog is incapable of knowing what is his and what is yours without being clearly shown in a way he understands. Do not punish your dog for chewing something up after he has done it- this will only confuse him and make it that much harder to get your message across to him. You must catch him in the act to make it a meaningful gesture. Each time you catch him chewing on something he shouldn't, take it away and replace it with one of his chew toys. You may also use a shaker can to distract him from the inappropriate item before you give him his chew toy. For persistent chewing on particular things, use a bitter tasting deterrent spray made for pets on the item. These products are harmless to your dog and the taste itself will be enough to keep him away from it.

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When you are unable to supervise your dog, keep him confined to a crate or dog proofed area of your home. The crate should be large enough for him to have ample room to stand up, turn around, and lie down. Create a relaxed atmosphere inside the crate with a bed or blanket to keep him comfortable and some chew toys to keep him occupied. Refer to Starmark's "Behavior Solutions: Crate Training" on www.starmarkacademy.com for advice on what to do.

In order to keep your dog from acquiring a chewing habit out of boredom, be sure you keep him physically active and mentally stimulated. Go through obedience training with him to ensure a clear line of communication and to keep his mind active. Schedule time each day to take your dog out for exercise: take him to a park; go for a walk, jog, or bike ride; play catch in the yard; or participate in dog sports like agility, flyball, herding, freestyle obedience, or anything else you are interested in. You can even take your dog to doggie day care to provide him with interaction in instances you won't be home much of the day.

Mistakes Will Be Made

Remember to keep realistic expectations of your dog. At some point, he will more than likely chew on something he isn't supposed to or even something of value. When this happens, back up your training and go back to the beginning. Make doubly sure that you keep everything you don't want mistaken as a toy picked up and out of his reach.

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No More Annoying Gnawing

Your dog may be a natural chewer, but it doesn't mean your home has to be a showplace of his dental records. At Starmark we believe that a well-behaved and well-trained dog is a happy dog and a better companion. Each dog is unique, and so is his owner. That's why we use a variety of techniques, customizing your dog's training experience to suit his personality and your individual needs. Using our training techniques, which emphasize consistency and patience, you won't have to darn your socks or your dog ever again.

Trainer Developed: Academy Tested

The certified training and behavior specialists at Starmark Academy created this behavior solutions guide with you and your dog's needs in mind. Products mentioned in this guide are available at PetSmart, Petco, and other pet supply retailers, as well as online at our web site: www.dogtrainingandboardingaustin.com. All products, guides and videos are tested and approved by the training directors of Starmark Academy, our accredited school for professional dog trainers. It is the hands-on experience of our training division, combined with the vast technical knowledge and experience of the Starmark Academy staff that allows us to bring you useful and unique dog training and behavior solutions. We train dogs just like yours every day; we work with pet enthusiasts just like you every day. Thank you for choosing Starmark, the world leader in pet education.

For additional pet solutions and information about our products, please visit Starmark online at our Web sites: www.austindogtrainingandboarding.com; www.schoolfordogtrainers.com; and www.aboutdogtraining.com.

200 County Road 197/Hutto, TX 78634/www.dogtrainingandboardingaustin.com

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Starmark Trainer's Recommended Equipment:

Starmark's Everlasting Treat Ball™- Give your dog something to chew on that's more fun and better tasting than your shoe! The unique shape of the ball allows it to wobble and roll on its own, and it's hollow inside so you can feed him his meals out of it or hide treats in it for long lasting chewing fun.

Starmark's Everlasting Treats™- All natural hard chew discs made to fit on the ends of the Everlasting Treat Ball™, or eaten as a healthy, good tasting chew treat.

Starmark's Pro-Training Treats™- All natural bite-sized treats that can be hidden inside the Everlasting Treat Ball™ or used during training. Your dog will have to figure out how to extract these tasty tidbits from the ball or what he has to do for you to give him one.

Starmark's Durafoam Disc™- New easy flying disc made of soft, puncture resistant material that won't hurt your dog's mouth (even if he's teething). Perfect for afternoon frolics.

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