

Toys aren't a luxury when it comes to your dog. They're an absolute necessity. They not only prevent boredom (and the negative behaviors that can arise when dogs are bored), they also stimulate their brains and trigger dogs' natural "play drive."

But which toys are best, you ask?

When choosing safe and fun toys, you should consider the size of your dog, his or her activity level, breed, tendencies, and preferences. For example, you wouldn't want to purchase an easy-to-tear-apart plush toy for an aggressive chewer, a huge chew toy for a tiny teacup, or a bite-size ball for a large breed.

In addition to being the right type of toy to suit your pet, your new toy needs to be safe as well as being durable and fun. Please keep in mind that no toy is truly indestructible but some are more durable and sturdier than others. You should always supervise your dog at play with any toys.

The best toys are often interactive. These types of toys allow both you AND your dog to play with the same toy together. What's more, toys that present an element of surprise or give your dog's brain a workout are especially beneficial.

Please keep the following tips in mind when choosing toys:

1. First, dog-proof your home and **get rid of dangerous items that dogs can mistake for toys.** Remove or keep the following in a safe place away from your dog: string, ribbon, rubber bands, children's toys, pantyhose and anything small that can be ingested.
2. Toys should always be the appropriate size for your pet. Balls and other items that are too small can be choking hazards. Pay special attention to any **pieces which could be chewed off and inhaled or swallowed.**
3. Small pieces of **rawhide** can be chewed off and become lodged in a dog's throat or damage their mouth. **It is best to avoid it altogether.**
4. Be especially cautious **of items with squeakers;** many dogs will try to chew them out of toys.
5. **Avoid toys with fillings** that can harm your dog, including nutshells and polystyrene beads.
6. Keep a variety of toys **available for your dog to access.** If your dog has a favorite "baby," you may want to leave it out all the time.
7. Interactive toys are important for providing quality active "people time," which not only engages your dog but helps **strengthen the bond between you and your dog.** Playing also reduces stress and boredom. The opportunity to interact also helps dogs develop better socialization skills and learn appropriate behavior.