

Choosing the Right Toys for Your Dog
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As we begin to do our Christmas shopping, most of us include our pets on our list of individuals to buy presents for. This column will offer some tips on buying gifts for dogs, and our next one will give suggestions for cats.

Regardless of the type of pet you have, choosing a toy that is safe should be the first priority. If you are buying your dog a ball for example, consider the size relative to your dog's windpipe. Don't choose a ball that is too small, which your dog could get stuck in the back of his throat, preventing him from breathing. Check the toy for any pieces your dog could tear off and swallow, or which also could become lodged in his windpipe. These include squeakers from squeaky toys, or eyes from stuffed toys. The knots dogs can chew off from the end of large rawhide chewies have also reportedly become lodged in the throat. When deciding whether to leave your dog alone with a specific toy, consider the possibility of choking.

Most dogs enjoy any plaything having to do with food. There are many interactive toys that can be stuffed with tidbits, requiring the dog to lick, paw and/or chew to obtain the food. One type can be filled with good tasting doggie toothpaste, so your dog's teeth are cleaned as he chews. Some of Ashley's and Mocha's favorites are the Goodie Ship, the Goodie Bone, and the Hav-A-Ball.

Other desirable items are chew toys, many of which also have the added advantage of being good for your dog's teeth. We often buy various flavors of Pop-Up Bones for our dogs, but there are many possibilities, including Booda Bones and Nyla-Bones. Most dogs enjoy a good game of tug-of-war, either with each other or with people, so tug toys are usually a hit. Contrary to popular belief, playing tug with your dog does not usually lead to aggression problems. Just follow the simple rule that if your dog touches you with his mouth while playing tug, the game is over. However, if you know your dog tends to guard his toys and isn't good about relinquishing them, tug might not be a good idea.

If you are in the habit of letting your dog tear open his presents, keep in mind that he may assume *all* the presents under the tree are for him. You may come home to an early Christmas when your dog decides to unwrap all of them by himself. We speak from experience!

The last option we'll suggest for a gift for your dog is an I.O.U. Make a promise to your dog that you'll take him for more walks next year – if not every day then every other day. Promise to set aside time each day to play with him and snuggle with him. Probably the best gift you can give your dog is more time with you and more time for physical activity. Dogs' lives are all too short. We owe it to them to help them live each day we have with them to the fullest.