

## Helping Destructive Behavior in Dogs

**New techniques and products offer hope for owners of destructive dogs.**

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Kovary favors crate training dogs when they are still puppies. "Crate training a dog when he's very young is preventative medicine," she said. "It stops destructive habits before they get a chance to become established. If you wait until the dog has eight months of chewing experience behind him before introducing the crate, it may be too late."

New products designed for potentially destructive pets include more satisfying toys and high-tech electronic deterrents for hard-to-handle dogs.

Kovary suggested owners provide lots of interactive play and a variety of toys for the dog to use alone. "Dogs who sit around with nothing to do end up vocalizing, digging and becoming destructive," she said.

One toy Kovary recommended is a hollow cube or ball with a hole in it that the owner fills with kibble. Pieces of kibble fall out as the dog plays. "It's like a little slot machine for dogs," she said.

But hold the number of toys down, Kovary said. "If you have a doggy Toys 'R' Us all over the living room, it becomes difficult for the dog to differentiate what's his from what's yours."

Deterrents include anti-chewing sprays and electronic sensors that warn the dog away when he gets into unauthorized territory.

"There are more and more anti-chewing sprays coming on the market each year," Schultz said, a sign that their use can provide at least some relief for furniture under fire. Kovary suggested spraying the edges and corners, which are the most likely chewing points.

Electronic sensors that detect the presence of an unwelcome pet and sound an unpleasant alarm also help.

"You can set them on counter tops for dogs who want to swipe things from the kitchen counter, or you can put them on the furniture for those dogs who just love to lie on the sofa," Schultz said.

The sensors work because they administer training even when the owner is away. "They're like the old tried-and-true tactic of setting up a pyramid of soda cans with pebbles in them in front of the trash can," Schultz said. "When the dog heads for the garbage, the cans fall down and scare him off. It works because the environment is doing the punishment, not the owner."

Noise technology works best in single-pet households. "Every animal in the house gets the correction when the noise sensor goes off," Schultz said, "so it works best if there is only one pet."

Doggy day care, a combination of old-fashioned dog walkers, pet sitters and kennels, can play an important role in the lives of pets with owners who must be away from home for a long time each day. "Long-term loneliness accounts for much of the problem in destructive pets," Kovary said. "Day care is an effective way to keep your dog from becoming too lonely."

With all the options available, finding the right solution may take some trial and error. But a little effort is worth it if it keeps you, your dog and your home safe and happy.