

Banish the boredom

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Toys keep pooches and pussycats active and engaged, preventing damage around the home from your pets.

Dogs love to chew and cats love to scratch - it's a natural behaviour - but there are ways to discourage them from being destructive in the home.

Pets are part of the family, and part of the household. The dynamic relationship between people and pets can add a great deal to life, as extensive research on the human-animal bond will attest.

It's one reason a growing number of people are bringing pets into their homes and into their hearts.

But boredom or lack of stimulation can sometimes lead to problem behaviour, with furniture or a pair of shoes becoming a target for unwanted paws, jaws or claws.

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That's where pet toys come into play.

Professional dog trainer Kenneth Morgan says the right toys can help alleviate boredom or anxiety in dogs by stimulating their mind, and keeping them busy.

"When you leave them alone, dogs get bored - and when dogs get bored, they chew," says Kenneth, who teaches obedience classes at Pet Paradise, a dog-training and boarding facility in Savannah, and who also offers private sessions through a mobile venture called Cayman Canine Training Services.

Toys provide an alternative to the furniture or your best pair of shoes, he says. They can also prevent destructive actions from developing. Puppies, for example, need toys to chew on to relieve the discomfort of teething.

"Generally, the more toys you put down, the more fun the dog will have," he says. "If you give it only one toy, it will get tired of it after a while."

Toy types

Toys serve a variety of purposes, including satisfying that natural urge to chew.

The type of toy depends on your dog's preferences and activity level, and should be appropriate for the dog's size - balls and other toys that are too small can be easily swallowed, or become lodged in the throat.


Toys should be made out of safe, durable materials. Be mindful, as well, of tiny pieces such as eyes or squeakers that dogs could ingest while playing.

Pet Paradise manager Andy Kronick points out that a happy dog is a tired dog and that plenty of exercise is key to preventing destructive behaviour.

"If they're tired, they're going to sleep," he says. "If they're bored and have a lot of energy, they're going to do damage."

Frisbees, balls, ropes and tug toys are great for burning off energy. Hard rubber toys, such as Kong-style products that can be stuffed with treats, are ideal for chewing and can entertain a curious canine for hours when you're not at home.

Bones and rawhides also keep dogs busy, and promote dental health. Kenneth recommends raw butcher's bones rather than smoked beef bones which can splinter. Oxtail or chicken bones are a no-no as they can splinter too. It's a good idea to supervise dogs when chewing rawhides, as they can pose a potential choking hazard.

Toys are especially important when bringing a new pet into the home as it may chew to comfort itself. 



Feline fun

Cats also need toys to keep them active and healthy, and prevent them from doing damage.

It's a natural behaviour for cats to scratch - you won't stop that, so you just have to give them an alternative.

Scratching posts are ideal, as well as cardboard scratching pads that can be sprinkled with catnip to draw their attention.

If the cat continues to claw the furniture or drapes, repellent sprays are a good solution to keep them away (there are also repellent sprays for dogs).

Cats get bored just as dogs do, and they love toys that move - it is part of their natural hunting instincts. Toys they can stalk, pounce or bat around are good choices. Having a variety of toys is also important to keep your cat interested.