

## Maintenance of dog toys



The first commercially produced dog toys appeared on shelves in the 19th century (the first toys were probably simple sticks). Efforts to provide variety in design and new ways to entertain have ramped up over the last 30 years. Today, dog toys are diverse. Offerings include interactive toys and products designed to cater for specific dog sizes and breed preferences for play.

The one thing that is universal, however, is that dog toys get dirty. They accumulate dust, saliva, bacteria from the mouth, bits of faecal matter and allergens from the environment. Cleaning your dog toys not only helps with hygiene in your home, but maintaining toys also extends the life of them, saving you money and preserving your dog's favourites for more hours of fun.

Sunny and warm days are the best for cleaning and drying toys; my clothesline is never more colourful than on dog toy cleaning day (see photo).

### **Cleaning approaches for toy types**

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to toy cleaning.

Cleaning rubber and hard plastic toys is easy. Wash these in hot and soapy water using a small brush to get into the corners and crevices. A toothbrush or small bottle brush are ideal for this type of cleaning. Some toys of these materials are dishwasher safe, usually for the top rack, making it very convenient to keep them clean year-round. Since it is universally advised to remove the tag from your dog's toy before allowing them to play with it, be sure you know which toys are dishwasher safe and which are not.

Plush and fabric toys are a little more challenging to clean. If they

are machine washable, washing in hot or very warm water is best for cleaning, using a fragrance-free detergent to not offend your dog's keen sense of smell.

Air drying on the clothesline in the hot summer sun is energy efficient and a good way to sanitise the toys even further by taking advantage of the sun's ultraviolet rays.

Rope toys should have extra attention because they are dense, trap moisture and can be an ideal spot for mould or bacteria to flourish. Soak these in a bucket of boiling water with vinegar added and then dry completely. Rope toys can be placed in the clothes dryer to assist drying, often a good finishing step to ensure that the toys that have come off the clothesline are completely dry inside.

### **Regularly inspect your dog's toys**

Make it a habit to check for loose parts including squeakers, leaking stuffing, and holes in all toys. I prefer plush toys that have embroidered details as opposed to plastic decorations, as these additions simply present more of a choking hazard.

Replacement squeakers can be purchased to extend the life of a toy — just be sure you have thoroughly sewn the toy closed before giving it back to your dog.

A good time to inspect is when you collect the toys to put them back in the toy box/basket.

Washing frequency depends on how much the toy is used; I aim to clean dog toys on a monthly basis. If a toy is smelly or noticeably dirty, then clean it right away. 🐾