

Dog Toy Checklist: What's Good and What to Avoid

Speaker Key

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Transcript

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SG Do you have a checklist or a set of filters you look at before you buy yet another dog toy. If you're anything like me, you actually may have a lot of dog toys. And in my defense, let me say if you're watching this on YouTube, that big pile of dog toys, a lot of them were donated by manufacturers who wanted me to test drive them for them.

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And if you are watching this on YouTube and you'd like to know about my checklist, go ahead and hit that like button right now before we get started. Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And today I'm going to share with you the 10 considerations I go through when I am evaluating whether a dog toy is a good thing for me to buy this particular one.

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Included in those 10 considerations is one that I'd be willing to bet for at least 90% of you listening, it's going to be a palm slap moment. You're going to go, "Wow Susan, I never ever thought of that." And by not thinking of it, you actually may be hurting your dog's learning, possibility of learning. You may be hurting something as simple as the game of retrieve. I'll get to that later.

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I'm also going to share the 6 categories I put dog toys into an "I want a toy for each of those six categories." Now there are some toys that will cover more than one category, but I can't think of a single one that will effectively cover all six. So, what I'm saying is you're going to need more than one dog toy.

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So, let's jump into the consideration. The 10 things that I think are important for all of us to consider before we add yet another dog toy to the shopping cart. The first and the obvious one and the one that many people will just decide on is *price*. Now you can go to the dollar store and buy a dog toy for a buck or two, but I highly encourage you not to do this. Because studies that have found there's a high degree of toxicity in the dog toys that are sold at some dollar stores. So please do not trust a dollar store for your dog training or dog toy supplies, please.

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But cost is definitely a consideration when a friend of mine just told me they bought a tug toy to train their dog with, and they love the dog toy, but it was \$50. So, for a lot of people, like that dog toy's off the charts. Let me just tell you that when I first started my dog training, all of the toys that I use with my dogs cost me nothing, nothing.

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And I'm going to share with you in an upcoming episode, how you can have great dog toys on a zero budget. All right. But today we've got to decide what are those 10 considerations that you really need to think about? Now I've told you cost is number one, but the *materials* that the dog toys are made of are they toxic? Is there something that could fall off and my dog could ingest?



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Is it, you know, when you pick it up and you do the Taylor Swift's sha- sha- sha- shake it off, do things fall off of it? Like, are there bits of fluff or threads that are constantly going to be shedding from that toy? Because that needs to be consideration.

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The most important thing is how toxic would this be to my dog putting it in their mouth? For me, if I'm buying for example a rubber toy, I would like it to be food grade quality rubber, super important. So, the materials are important. Are they toxic? If it's something like you want to use for water retrieving, does it float? Does it even float? So, the material that this toy is made of, is it something that is going to be attractive to my dog? Is it something that's going to be float if I needed it to float? And is it something that is not toxic? So important.

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Number three, *how attractive is this toy to my dog?* And you need to know your own dog. So, I happened to know that my dog Swagger loves holding rubber in his mouth, like a rubber toy. He'll just hold it forever in his mouth. He is less likely to hold something that's cloth, but in a pinch, he'll take anything. Some little dogs love, they insist on something that squeaks. So, does the toy have something that is going to be attractive?

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It's depending on the size of your dog, is the material like really thick and it'll take like, eating a hero sandwich for them to even grab onto that toy? So, you've got to consider the attractiveness of the toy to your dog. What does your dog like? My puppy loves the crinkly sounding, it's, I don't know what it is, but you can find it in a lot of dog toys at the dog store. How's that for descriptive? It's a crinkly sounding thing with material on it. That's what I'm talking about right there. So how attractive is what this dog toy is made up to your particular dog?

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Number four, you need to consider your *dog's power*. How powerful is your dog's jaw and their disposition? So, let's take a big Terrier type dog. Even my small Jack Russell Terriers, man, they had powerful jaws. And sometimes just the act of playing with something, if it was a really fragile toy it would like disintegrate in their mouth. I have friends who actually use cat toys with their small dogs. And their delicate little dogs will chase them and pounce on them and interact with them. That would be carnage with my Terriers.

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So, you need to consider how powerful is your dog. And do you need to, you know, write a letter and ask the manufacturer or look at the Amazon reviews to how tough is this toy actually. Because if you're spending \$50 for a toy and your powerful dog, it's not going to last long.

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I had a Border Collie that every time he put a tug toy in his mouth, he would immediately throw it to his back teeth, to the carnassial teeth, which are the teeth that can shred flash. And he would just saw off almost any material, the toy would be snapping too. I'm like, how the heck did you do that? Most dogs when you're tugging with them, they put the toy just behind their canines, those big teeth that hang down in the front.



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They'll just flip the toy behind their canines when they play. Not this dog, he'd throw it to the back and saw it off. So, you need to consider the strength and the style of play your dog has when you are considering whether you should be purchasing yet another dog toy.

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You need to consider your own *physical limitations*. For example, do you have 120-pound Rottie and you're an 85-year-old woman with arthritis, and you're going to get flung around like a rag in the wind if that dog gets a hold of a toy. And so maybe tugging isn't the best thing, depending on the tug toy. Maybe your style of play with that dog. I once had a student at a workshop I taught in New Hampshire and he was in a wheelchair.

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So, I had him just toss toys. And we taught his dog to put the toy back on his lap super fast. And he had like juggling with the dog and that was the way that they played. So, you need to consider your own physical limitations and how you're going to play. And I know for myself, I have very strong dogs. And sometimes my lower back isn't as happy as it could be. So, I need to consider that when I'm purchasing a tug toy. Doesn't mean I don't tug. It means I consider that as a factor when I'm purchasing a tug toy.

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Point number six, *can this toy be cleaned?* If it's a rubber toy, is it dishwasher safe? Can I just throw it in the top rack of the dishwasher or is it something I could throw in my washing machine? I have had tug toys that I throw in the washing machine that literally like, they look like a bomb went off in my washing machine when I opened the door. So obviously most toys don't belong in the dryer, but you would like to be able to throw them in the washing machine because dog's mouth on toys hanging around in a dog bag and then coming out every couple of days could create some bacteria that you want to get rid of.

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You want to be able to clean your toys. So, point number six that you need to consider, how easy would it be to clean this toy? Throw it into the washing machine or the dryer. Those are really the only two ways that I would recommend unless you have an Autoclave. Do you have an Autoclave? I don't know. Do you own a university? You might have an Autoclave.

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Point number seven, *what does your dog even like?* Some dogs they love balls, but they're not as keen on tug toys. My very first dog, she would tug with anything, but her most favorite toy in the world was a rock. Yes, like a stone. The bigger, the better. But you know about the size of a small baseball was her favorite.

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My little Jack Russell loved rocks. Now we had an agreement as long as she didn't chew it, she could hold rocks. She would still play tug with other toys. I remember once coming out of an agility ring. I always left her rock at the outside the agility ring, any rock would do. So, someone kicked a rock, I could find another one. I came out of the agility ring and I said, get your rock. She dove on a rock. She took two steps.



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And then I noticed somebody had dropped on the ground a full intact hot dog. Now it wasn't like a 12 incher, but it was a hot dog. They had I guess brought out to cut up for their dog. Well, Shelby saw that hot dog and pounced on it like it was manna from heaven. Like she just captured her own squirrel. She picked that hot dog up in her mouth. And before she even had a time to bite down on it, she, I could just see the wheels going through her brain, "Oh my gosh, my rock!" She's spit out the hot dog, dove on a rock, picked up a rock and pranced around with her little Jack Russell tail up in the air just, she just loved rocks.

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Now my most recent Terrier, Decaff, for her it was flyswatters. She went gaga. That was the best training toy I ever found. And she just loved them, and I didn't fight it. She tugged with anything I asked her, but the special toy was the flyswatter. So that is a critical point to ask yourself, what does my dog like? Some dogs they just love playing with, you know, rolled up paper, an old paper towel toy, a roll or toilet paper roll. Most dogs love those things.

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All right. So, what does your dog like? Number eight, *does this toy make noise?* Now how are you going to feel about this noise in let's say a week? Because for example, the infamous Giggle ball, and a lot of dogs love this, but I just want to take a long walk after a while of listening to a dog play with it.

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I mean at first, it's entertaining, I love to watch them have fun, but enough with a giggling ball already. So, consider are you going to be okay with listening to that toy? Kind of like when you buy a kid, you know, one of those guitars for Christmas. Are you going to be okay listening to that, you know, 24 hours a day? Yeah, maybe not.

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The next consideration is the *color* of the toy. This is the thing that I think a lot of you are not going to consider. There is an App you can download called Dog Vision. What this App does, it shows you what you're looking at looks like to a human and what it looks like to a dog, because a dog doesn't have the same construction of their eye that us humans have.

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They don't have the same number of rods and cones. Therefore, they had the advantage of seeing really, really well at night. But they don't see well generally, and they definitely don't see color well. Take for example, if I was going to train my puppy to get up on these little pods, I might go, "Oh, wow. I love red. It's so bright." And the puppy can see it on the, out in the grass. I'll say this was a green grass or she would know what I want. She'd jumped right up on it.

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Now take a look at this same pod through the eyes of my dog. As in contrast to if I was using a blue pod. Now I would say a blue pod in green grass, it's like dull, why would I use that? Who knew that dogs can see blue a heck of a lot better than they can see red? So, before you're going to pick a toy, especially when you're going to be retrieving outside, or you're going to be retrieving in the water, download this app, flip it open, take a look at your toy in the store or online before you invest in it. Because you might be creating a ton of frustration for yourself or your dog.



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Now dogs are brilliant, and they figure it out if you have one that isn't a perfect color, but why not help them out? Consider the color before you buy the toy. And the last consideration is the *goal*. What is the purpose of buying this toy?

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I have 6 categories that I will put a toy into. All six of them coincidentally start with the letter E. The six E's. So, am I buying this toy for **engagement**? Meaning I want it to be a bonding episode for my dog. And often this means something that starts training or I interrupt training with, or I end training with or something I just do because it's fun when I'm out with a walking my dog. So, a bonding toy for engagement between us. That's one category that I would put a toy into.

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Another is **exercise**. Is my primary goal of purchasing this toy a way to exercise my dog? There's a huge variation that that category takes into consideration. You could spend a thousand dollars on a toy that will exercise your dog. You can also spend a couple of bucks. All right. So, exercise the second E.

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The third one is **education**. Like these pods. Am I going to be using this toy as a way of educating my dog? Something if I'm using it for the sport of agility for example, I'll need something I can throw so that my dog can be reinforced when they're a long way away from me. So, I have education. Am I going to be using this toy to educate my dog? I have exercise. I have engagement.

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The fourth category is **enrichment**. Is the primary goal of purchasing this toy to enrich my dog's life? So, for example, maybe I'm going out to work and I'm going to lead them playing with a little food puzzle while I go out the door. So, it lowers the stress and anxiety associated with me leaving. Or maybe I'm super busy working on the computer or I'm shooting a podcast. And so, I will give them a problem solving, something they can use their nose with. So that's the reason for buying the toy is to enrich their life.

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The fifth reason is, is this something that's just meant to be **entertainment** for my dog? Is it a toy that they can just play by themselves with? That it's just mindless fun that they have a great old time. My dogs have a lot of toys that are just pure entertainment for them. And the final, the final category is **eating**.

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Is this a toy that I intend primary goal of this toy is to deliver food for my dog? Maybe all of their meal could be packed into this toy. Or maybe I'm just going to have it spit out a few rewards. So is eating. Now you can see there's a crossover, a toy that is engagement could also be eating. A toy that is education could also be exercise and it could also be all five of them.

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However, I found that there are toys that I go to, depending on what I am about to do with my dog. And the next episode of Shaped by Dog, I'm going to share with you what toys I love for each one of these categories.





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And in a week's time, I'm going to give away my favorite toy that I use for engagement. All you have to do to qualify is jump on YouTube, click the like button and leave me a comment. Comment on this episode, comment on my podcasts in general, comment on our YouTube channel, comment on what you'd like to hear from me in an upcoming episode.

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Just leave me a comment and you will be entered in the draw where I will ship you my personal favorite toy that I like to use with my dog when I'm working on engagement. Now, I won't give you the actual toy with a spit and everything. I will get you a brand new one. All right. That's it for today on Shaped by Dog.

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We'll see you next time on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

[Vlog: How to Pick the Best Toys for Your Puppy or Dog](#)

[Vlog: Why Colours Matter in Dog Agility \(Featuring Nicki Gurr\)](#)

[Apple iOS App "Dog Vision HD" by Laan Labs](#)

[Android App Dog Vision](#)

[Podcast Episode 2: Reinforcement](#)



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About Susan

A world-leading educator of dog trainers, Susan is also one of the most successful agility competitors of the last three decades. She has won multiple Gold Medals at National or World Championship events with every dog she has ever owned over the past 30 years. Susan was one of the very first dog trainers to share knowledge online when she opened her "Clicker Dogs" website many years ago. Susan has helped hundreds of thousands of people enjoy a great relationship with their dogs through her workshops and keynote speaking around the world, award winning books, DVDs, magazine articles, blog posts, podcasts, free dog training and dog agility video series, and online dog training programs.



A natural teacher and an entertaining speaker, Susan is world renowned for her dog training knowledge and practical application of that knowledge. Her understanding of how to apply science-based learning principles to both competitive and family pet dog training has been pivotal in changing how dogs are trained.

Susan is now helping many thousands of dog owners in 82 countries have the best relationship possible with their dogs. The real joy for her comes from bringing confidence to dogs and their owner through playful interactions and relationship building games that are grounded firmly in the science of how animals learn.



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