For your dog, goofing off is serious business. Toys help stave off boredom, provide comfort, can be a tool for training, and help prevent problem behaviors. Choosing the right toys for your dog enriches their lives by keeping them mentally and physically stimulated and lets them satisfy chewing tendencies safely (sparing your furniture).

What to Consider When Choosing a Dog Toy  
**Size:** Choose toys large enough that your dog can’t work them to the back of their mouth. Toys that are too small are potential choking hazards.

**Activity:** Your dog’s play habits will change as they grow. A teething puppy has different needs from an adult dog.

**Playstyle:** Some dogs love tug-of-war, others love to chew, solve puzzles, or play “keep away”, and some dogs might just enjoy hanging out with their toy.

**Environment:** Consider what toys will work best where your dog plays. Hardy rubber balls or frisbees are perfect for fetch enthusiasts with outdoor space to run while plush toys are suited for indoor play sessions.

Active Toys

From fetch to tug-of-war, these dog toys encourage healthy play and sharing the fun:

* Hard, chewy rubber dog toys
* Toys with reinforced construction to hold up to rough play
* Rope toys with knotted ends
* Tennis balls, under close supervision. The balls should be sized appropriately, too-small balls can be swallowed or become a choking hazard.
* Toys that make noise—squeaks and crinkles are sensory cues that will keep your dog engaged

Distraction Toys

Task-oriented play can release pent-up energy, alleviate stress, and mentally stimulate your dog, helping to ward off boredom:

* Rubber toys with hidden treats or peanut butter
* “Busy box”-style toys with hidden treats
* Antler or natural bone that is specially treated for a dog

Comfort Toys

Soft dog toys can be soothing companions for your dog. Don’t let your dog play with toys for children, plush toys for dogs will hold up better. Try using:

* Soft, machine-washable stuffed or unstuffed plush toys appropriately sized for your dog
* Your own castoff clothing (e.g., an old T-shirt) with your smell

Play It Safe

Always supervise your dog’s playtime. Here’s what to avoid and watch out for:

* Toys with string, ribbon, feathers, rubber bands, small plastic eyes, and any other embellishment your dog can remove, chew, or eat.
* If your dog disembowels stuffed toys or rips up rope toys, the stuffing or rope fragments can be a choking hazard or cause intestinal problems if swallowed.
* Tennis balls can be a choking hazard. Additionally, too-small rubber balls quickly become slimy during play and can slip down your dog’s throat.
* Toys containing toxins like dyes and preservatives, heavy metals, and fire retardants (which may contain formaldehyde and other chemicals). Trust your instincts and pay attention to your own senses. Strong chemical smells indicate residual chemicals. Use the “sniff” test: if the toy gives off a strong chemical odor, avoid it.
* Balls with a single air hole can create deadly suction.
* Soft plastics.
* Toys with sharp parts or corners.
* Avoid poultry and rib bones, which tend to break and splinter. Rib bones and cow hooves can also fracture a tooth.

The Power of Play

Safe, interactive play helps keep your dog happy and healthy, aids in training and socialization, and is a great way to build your bond together, too. Investing in a lineup of appropriate toys sets your dog up for success, helping them lead their best life.