

Christmas and dog toys

■ BY HARRY KALAJIAN

As the holidays approach, we must all exercise caution in choosing the gifts we buy for our pets as toys and treats. Why? Because each individual dog possesses a different character and temperament, so choosing the best gift is vital and personal. And the dog's safety must also be taken into account. Here are a few things to take into consideration. Any toy that you buy for your pet should not encourage a behavior you dislike. If you do, it can elevate that unwanted behavior. For example, if you buy a tug toy and play tug of war, all you're doing is elevating your pet's aggression and possessiveness. If you really want to get your dog a tug toy, then you must use it properly, never letting your dog win. You must win always, or Fido will realize that if he holds on tight you will give in. This teaches him to become possessive of anything he wants, and if he grabs an item of yours, he will not release it without a fight.

However, if you're trying to build up your pet's confidence, you can use the tug toy – but you must win always and then give Fido the tug toy as a reward. That will show him that you are still the alpha dog.

If you have a puppy, don't buy it a stuffed toy, because in time it will rip the toy apart. That may well lead to your puppy attacking a pillow you own that has stuffing in it, because your pup can't differentiate between its stuffed toy and your property at that age (and possibly even when it's older).

Avoid toys that have a squeaker in them, not just because the noise is annoying but because Fido might end up swallowing the squeaker. Always use your judgment when buying toys and consider the pros and cons. Look at the makeup of the toy. Is it plastic, rubber or nylon, and does it have any metallic parts that might harm your dog? Always buy good quality toys that will last and won't fall apart.

When you're buying a chewy treat such as a rawhide bone, make sure it

is a thick bone and much bigger than your dog's head. The rule of thumb is that it should be twice the width of your dog's head. When you buy a small bone, even for a small dog, there is a great risk that the dog will try to chew it up and swallow it. I have seen many dogs choke from that.

If you live on the island or are visiting Boca Grande, stop off at the Island Dog Boutique and talk to Jane Moyer. She can guide you in selecting the best treats and toys and can advise you on what will be good for your particular dog.

Always buy your dog American- or Canadian-made products.

A Christmas tree with all its colored ornaments, lights and tinsel can create havoc if your dog gets to it. Your pet's curiosity will get it into trouble, followed by a visit to the veterinarian. Be vigilant and never allow your dog to go near the tree or a Christmas plant such as poinsettias or holly. That could also save you a trip to the vet.

The holidays also bring many

sweets to the table. Be careful that your dog doesn't get to them.

If you're planning to buy a puppy or adopt an adult dog, make sure you get one that has the right character and temperament according to your lifestyle and home environment. One of the best gifts to give your puppy or dog is a professional obedience training course. It will save you much heartache in the long run.

Wishing you all Happy Holidays and a very Merry Christmas, and let's make 2021 a prosperous and healthy new year.

Have a woof woof of a month.

Harry Kalajian M.D.T., behaviorist, ethologist & psychologist, has over 32 years of experience in all aspects of training. Executive Dog Training Inc. 941-447-8234 executivedogtraining.com



NOT DOG FRIENDLY

■ Holly or mistletoe

■ Poinsettias