

Gear of the Year

Some of our favorite dog-training and dog-care tools and toys.

BY NANCY KERNS

We asked WDJ's contributors for their recommendations for "things they can't imagine living without" in their dog-care kits – their favorite dog toys, training tools, and treats. Here are some of the products that made their lists of things that they *must* have for their dogs.

ORBEE-TUFF® SNOOP®

The bulk of Sandi Thompson's 26 years as a dog trainer has been spent teaching group puppy classes and hosting weekly puppy socials at Bravo!Pup, her training business in Berkeley, California. So she's been asked (*thousands* of times) to suggest good toys for puppies and bored dogs. She strongly recommends the use of food-stuffed, interactive toys to help dogs and puppies develop the habit of entertaining themselves. She usually advises owners to buy several types of toys and see what works for their individual dogs, because dogs have their own preference for the "mouth feel" of various toys. Also, she has yet to find a single toy that appeals to *all* dogs. Or has she?

A couple months ago, Thompson found the Orbee-Tuff Snoop at a dog show, and thought it looked interesting enough to buy and try with her own dogs. The Snoop is made of a squishy, translucent material, and it's designed to have its center pulled out (it's hard to describe, see the photo at left), so treats can be poured inside and the inner layer folded back into the toy. Dogs can see, smell, and even *feel* the treats through the material, but they really have to work to get them out – and they do! Some interactive toys are too difficult for puppies; often, they don't persist long enough to be rewarded with the treats. But with the Snoop, puppies keep at it! Thompson provides three different types of treat balls on the floor at her puppy socials – and says that all the puppies prefer this one. Best of all, unlike a lot of the treat-dispensing toys, the Snoop is soft, so it doesn't make a lot of noise rolling around on hardwood floors. Note that the Snoop is intended for puzzle-play, it's not meant for chewing.

You can also make it more difficult for puzzle-savvy dogs to get the treats. After you fill it with food, you can insert a ball (Planet Dog recommends their other Orbee-Tuff balls, but tennis balls work fine) into the center, so the dog has to figure out how to remove the ball before he can start getting the treats. Thompson says, "My dogs love the Snoop, and so do my clients' dogs and puppies."

ORBEE-TUFF SNOOP – \$18

Planet Dog, Westbrook, ME. (800) 381-1516; planetdog.com



SOGGY DOGGY DOORMAT AND SOGGY DOGGY SUPER SHAMMY

Most of us who share our homes with dogs have doormats and employ old towels at the threshold of our homes, in an attempt to reduce the amount of water, mud, sand, and other debris that our canine companions track into the house. A dog who is wet from rain or snow is a particularly potent threat to wood or laminate floors (and of course, carpets and upholstery).

Here are some products that look better (and work better) than old towels for getting water and mud off of a dog's coat and paws:

Soggy Doggy discovered a micro-fiber chenille material that can absorb five times as much water as cotton, dries quickly, and is long-lasting and durable. The company uses the material in a doormat (that has a no-slip backing), a dog-drying shammy (featuring pockets at the ends for your hands), and other products. We haven't tried the other products, but we absolutely love the shammy and the doormat. The mat looks nice, and both tools trap and hold an astonishing amount of water, debris, and hair, and yet can be shaken out easily and quickly dried.

SOGGY DOGGY DOORMAT – \$40

SOGGY DOGGY SUPER SHAMMY – \$20

Soggy Doggy Productions
Larchmont, NY
(877) 504-4811
soggydoggydoormat.com



SAFESTIX

The Kong Company developed this toy with two canine activities in mind: safe retrieving and tugging (they are not chew toys). Safestix are molded out of a bendable plastic in a shape that will prevent all the kinds of injuries that dogs can suffer from playing fetch with wood sticks. The ball shapes at either end prevent throat punctures or choking (if a dog happens to grab for one end as it hits the ground); and the flexibility of the material means that the dog won't break a tooth or get hurt if he misjudges the flight of the stick and gets hit in the head when he tries to catch it in the air.

A Kong representative told us that people who train dogs for law enforcement asked the company to develop a toy that could be used for a quick session of tug as a reward – but one that wouldn't continue to stimulate the dog when the handler stopped tugging. Apparently, it can be difficult to get these high-octane dogs to let go of ("out") rope toys, since the rope moves in the dog's mouth even after the handler stops pulling. So Kong made the toy with a plastic that would be gummy enough to invite a dog to bite down on it, durable enough to resist damage from all that mouthing, but rigid enough so that it would be immediately clear to a tugging dog when the handler said the game was over.

Safestix come in three sizes, from 12 inches to 27 inches. They come in several neon colors for easy visibility, and they float in water, too.

SAFESTIX – \$6-12 (depending on size)

The Kong Company, Golden, CO. (303) 216-2626; kongcompany.com



TUCKER'S CHICKEN BREAST TREATS

We were not fans of dried chicken chews even before China-sourced products began causing dogs to become ill and even die – mostly because these products are so dry that it's like feeding sharp splinters to your dog. Tucker's solved both the questionable sourcing and over-dried issues and has completely won us over with its moist chicken treats.

The treats are relatively expensive, and if we were feeding something like this to our dogs every day, we'd probably just keep fresh-roasted chicken on hand. The benefit of these is their convenience; they can be kept for weeks or months in your purse, car glove box, or desk, and pulled out just when you need an irresistible, safe, wholesome training treat for your dog.

Tucker's sources all of its meats in the U.S. and Canada, and only partially dehydrates them before slicing, hand-rolling, and packing each treat in individually vacuum-sealed packages. The anaerobic environment keeps the meaty treat moist and soft, but prevents degradation or bacterial growth without the use of glycerin or preservatives, so when you peel apart the package, the treat is chewy and appealing as fresh meat to your dog.

All of Tucker's products are manufactured in a USDA-inspected plant in Wisconsin with human-quality ("edible") meats. The chicken breast treats come in four varieties: just chicken breast, and chicken breast rolled around a strip of either bacon, dried apple, or dried banana.

TUCKER'S CHICKEN BREAST TREATS – \$27 for 1 lb bag

Tucker's Bones, Pleasant Prairie, WI. (800) 219-3650; tuckersbones.com



BEDS

When we go into pet-supply stores, we're always drawn to the dog beds; we're on a perpetual quest for products that are thick enough to provide real cushioning, and yet easy to wash. What we generally find are mats that are thin (though easy to launder) and beds that are thick but either difficult to wash (with covers that are hard to get on and off), that don't hold up well to washing (we've had some that literally fell apart after two washings), or unwashable (with non-removable covers and heavy stuffing). The thin ones – feh! What's the point of buying something that your dog doesn't want to sleep on? We admit we have bought our share of inexpensive thick ones that need to be thrown out at some point (because they can't be laundered), but we don't feel good about it; it's a waste of money and bad for the environment.

The following products provide the perfect solution: comfortable, washable, durable beds that can stand the test of time.



WEST PAW DESIGN'S ECO NAP

Desperation drove us to West Paw Design's Eco Nap mat. In Otto's first two years with us, he destroyed at least half a dozen dog beds. If they contained stuffing they got chewed open and de-stuffed. The Eco Nap was the first bed he didn't eat – and five years later, it's still attractive and still one of his favorites. The bed is basically a pad made (in Bozeman, Montana!) with a very thin layer of West Paw Design's "exclusive Intelliloft® fibers" sandwiched between two layers of synthetic fleece (made of the same material, which derives from recycled plastic bottles). The outer edge is stuffed thicker than the center, and yet never drew Otto's chewing attention the way most "stuffed" beds did. Best of all, while the material is thick enough to provide enough cushioning to draw all the animals in the house to it, it's light enough to be washed in a regular top-loading washing machine and dryer – no special trips to the heavy-duty machines at the laundromat required. The price might seem high given the simplicity of the product, but these beds hold up to everyday use and washing so well, they have paid for themselves several times over. The Eco Nap comes in five sizes and six colors.

Now that Otto is older and wiser and doesn't eat beds anymore, we use an Eco Nap on top of a bed that is made with a thick slab of foam (but which has one of those not-durable, hard-to-wash covers).

ECO NAP – \$29 (xs, 14" x 19") - \$99 (xl, 29" x 41")

West Paw Design, Bozeman, MT. (800) 433-5567; westpawdesign.com



PURPLE PEBBLE'S CUDDLE MAT

The Cuddle Mat is a similar "flat mat" type of bed, but is made in the U.S. without any stuffing, out of a high-pile synthetic fleece material that washes easily and dries quickly. Purple Pebble says the material is hypoallergenic and stain-resistant, making the Cuddle Mat ideal for puppies, convalescing dogs, or dogs with sensitive skin. Because it does not contain stuffing, the cushioning is consistent even after many trips through the washer and dryer – no lumps! We've used a Cuddle Mat for over a year, most recently with a teething adolescent dog, and it's holding up perfectly. The mat comes in one color ("natural") and eight standard sizes and an "SUV" size. (The company will also make custom-sized products at

no premium.) Fold a large one in two, and you may have to physically prevent the dogs and cats from fighting over who gets to sleep on it.

Purple Pebble offers two additional styles of the Cuddle Mat: one with an attached pillow, and one made for use in crates, with a bumper on three sides. (The bumper is the same material as the mat, with scored sides extending about 5" up the sides of the crate. The bumpers don't take away from the dog's space in the crate, nor do they pose a potential safety risk if chewed and ingested).

CUDDLE MAT – \$28 (xs, 13" x 22")- \$120 (xxxl, 37" x 54")

Purple Pebble, Waldwick, NJ. (201) 444-7439; purplepebble.com



CUBBY

Okay, just one more bed. This one is not only novel, but also fabulously flexible.

"I'm a connoisseur of dog beds, from those impossibly cheap, sawdust-filled rounds of fabric sold at wholesale stores to princess-caliber, canopied numbers worthy of Downton Abbey," says Denise Flaim, a Rhodesian Ridgeback breeder and regular contributor to WDJ. "By far my favorite is the Cubby. Easily washed and available in lots of fashionable faux furs – chinchilla, anyone? – these are the Transformers of dog beds: They can be flat little circles of plushness, stuffed into themselves to make little nests, or folded in half into den-like 'cubbies' that my kids have dubbed 'dog tacos.' Whatever you call them, neither my dogs nor I would be without them."

Adds Flaim, "Bonus: If you have a favorite heirloom blanket or vintage chenille spread that has seen better days, Good Dog Beds can convert it into a fetching custom bed. Now, *that's* recycling."

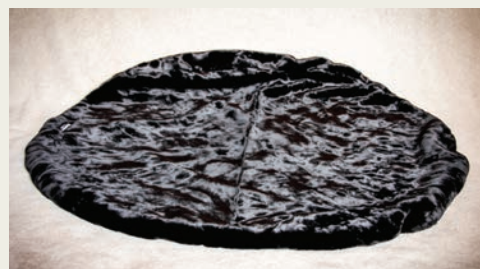
Cubby beds are made in California, and are available in four sizes and a wide variety of fabrics.

CUBBY – \$52 (s, 17" opening) - \$202 (xl, 60" opening)

GoodDogBeds.com, Huntington Beach, CA. (714) 319-0353; gooddogbeds.com



**Above: A Cubby bed folded into a "dog taco."
Below: An opened Cubby.**



HELP 'EM UP HARNESS

The Help 'Em Up harness is a favorite of canine rehabilitation professionals and puts to shame the idea of using a towel to lift or support a mobility-impaired dog. This well-made, heavy-duty, machine-washable harness is ergonomically designed with soft, comfortable padding and waterproof Neoprene. The harness offers great support for dogs who have mobility issues, allowing them to maintain independence with just a little help from their people. An additional benefit of the harness comes in the form of neuro-stimulation: with the hind-end support linked to the front, the dog's entire nervous system continues to receive stimulation, reminding his brain that he still has a hind end!

The harness consists of front and back pieces that are detachable from one another, and features two strong, comfortable, rubber handles. The harness can be placed on your dog even when he's lying down, and is comfortable enough to leave on him all day. For the best fit, consult a veterinary rehab professional.

New for 2014 are features that make using the harness more comfortable for the human handler: a "walking handle" and a "walking leash/shoulder strap," to provide additional walking assistance and extra leverage when lifting and/or walking.



"I used a Help 'Em Up Harness with our elderly Bouvier in his later years, and it changed all our lives for the better," says WDJ contributor and K9 Nose Work instructor Lisa Rodier.

**HELP 'EM UP HARNESS –
\$75-120 (depending on size)**

**Blue Dog Designs, Denver, CO
(720) 237-6852; helpemup.com**

THE DOG ANATOMY WORKBOOK: A GUIDE TO THE CANINE BODY

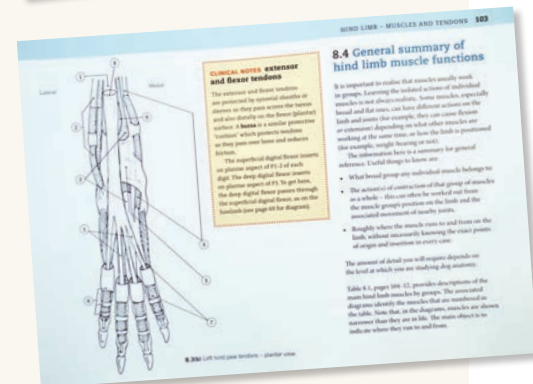
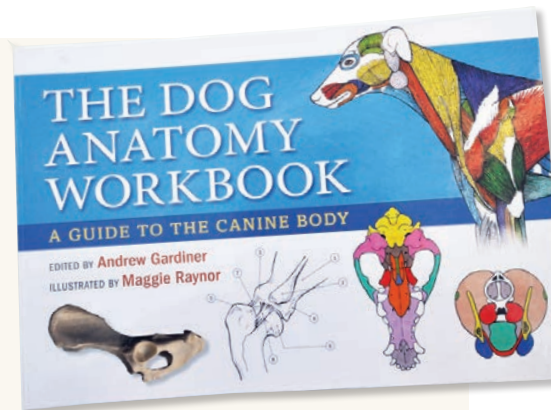
Anyone with an interest in canine health or canine athletes should run to buy this book. Participants in canine sports and owners nursing dogs with sports injuries would also benefit. The book not only clearly shows all the structures in the dog's body, but explains how they work, both alone and with related structures – and discusses some of the most common things that can go wrong, from malocclusion of the teeth to hip dysplasia.

Edited by Andrew Gardiner, a veterinarian and clinical lecturer at the Royal School of Veterinary Studies at the University of Edinburgh, and illustrated by Maggie Raynor, a sought-after animal illustrator who lives in Sheffield, England, the book is not an anatomy textbook, but a true workbook. Though there are illustrations, photographs, and even x-rays that depict every muscle, bone, and organ, the book also contains opportunities to color and label bones, muscles, ligaments, organs, and all other systems of the canine body, in order to most thoroughly learn and understand them.

The book has a hard cover but is spiral-bound, enabling the book to lay flat enough to draw and write on. Instruction is given on the proper method for learning anatomy (such as creating lists, devising acronyms, and labeling diagrams), and the "language of anatomy" (directional terms such as cranial, caudal, rostral, etc.) is explained.

THE DOG ANATOMY WORKBOOK – \$45

Trafalgar Square Books, N. Pomfret, VT. (800) 423-4525; trafalgarbooks.com



Note that on the manufacturer's website, the first product on the pull-down order form is the Kool Chamois Pad, even though an illustration of the Kool Koat appears alongside the product description.

KOOL CHAMOIS PAD

The Kool Chamois Pad is a lightweight, PVA chamois pad that, when wet, acts as a cooling mat. Made by long-time dog enthusiast Sandy Teague, the mat is easy to wet, and doesn't get heavy or bulky like other cooling mats do when water is added.

Lisa Rodier lives in Georgia with a thick-coated dog, Atle, a Bouvier des Flandres (seen modeling with the Kool Chamois Pad). Rodier says she wouldn't consider making a summer car trip with Atle without the Kool Chamois Pad along for the ride. "We used the mat in Atle's car crate during multiple-day road trips in the searing summer heat, and he stayed cool and comfortable throughout," Rodier says. "Although the pad didn't require frequent re-wetting, doing so was easy."

The mat's stock size is 17" x 27" and sells for \$17. For a large dog like Atle, WetCoat.com is

happy to customize the product; Teague sewed two mats together to make one large (33" x 27") pad, for just \$34. The Kool Chamois is machine-washable, and should be air-dried between uses. While WetCoat.com uses the same material in its cooling coats (the main product they sell), in a pinch, the mat can be draped over your dog's back to be used as a cooling coat. Simplicity itself!

KOOL CHAMOIS PAD – \$17

WetCoat.com, Orlando, FL. (407) 422-2345; wetcoat.com