

Presents for Pets

Healthy, Natural Holiday Treats



by Gail Condrick

We have good news for anyone in search of a nifty gift for a furry or feathered family member. Whether the occasion is a holiday, birthday or animal appreciation day, there is a “green” pet gift to celebrate it. The mantra of reduce, reuse and recycle is now present in the pet industry, providing many more eco-friendly options.

At this year’s 2010 Global Pet Expo, buyers attending the annual pet industry gathering were abuzz about a new exhibit area called Natural Pets.

“Natural products are expanding the industry. When you have a new trend for humans, this appeals to the pet industry, as well,” observes Steven King, president of the Pet Industry Distributors Association.

Just this year, Americans will have spent an estimated \$47 billion on pet products and services, according to the American Pet Products Association.

Categories include food, pet supplies, over-the-counter medicines and vet care services and products, many of them incorporating natural materials. The industry reports that, on average, pet owners annually spend \$40 per dog and \$19 per cat on toys alone.

One more fur-raising fact: American Pet Association statistics reveal that of the nation’s 140 million household cats and dogs, 31 million dogs and 39 million cats will have presents waiting for them under the tree on Christmas morning. Also, people will celebrate the birthdays of as many as 13.5 million

cats and 9.8 million dogs with parties and pet gifts.

What is a politically correct, Earth-conscious shopper to do?

We can choose organic and natural products for the same reasons we would go natural in buying decisions for human family members. Concerned citizens are demanding greater use of nontoxic, pesticide- and chemical-free materials that are better for the health of people, pets and the planet.

As Patricia Castaneda, owner of Pet’s Life Naturally, in Palmetto, Florida, advises: “Don’t give anything to your pet that you would not put in the mouth of a small child.” That means no dyes or toys that have small parts to swallow or that are made of toxic materials. Pets can be sensitive to fabrics that come in contact with their skin, just like humans are, creating painful and costly allergic reactions. She admonishes, “Your animals count on you to protect them.”

Feline Prowess

The Humane Society of America believes that wise use of toys, combined with regular playtime, contributes to the health and happiness of cats of all ages. Play satisfies their instinctual hunting drive, develops mental and physical agility and provides bonding time with their humans. The society recommends cat toys that offer variety: one to carry, one to wrestle with, one to roll and one to “baby.”

What is right for your cat? Pet store professionals know which products customers purchase and enjoy. As Castaneda remarks, “Cats are so creative and independent they can have fun with ping-pong balls, cardboard toilet paper rolls and plastic shower rings. Just make sure that what they play with cannot be eaten or harm them.”

Of course, the whole family can enjoy creating original cat toys using a bit of imagination, along with organic cotton, natural ingredients and a needle and thread. Just follow the same rules of thumb for homemade playthings to keep the animals safe.

Canine Wisdom

Dogs need toys to fight boredom when left alone for any length of time, according to the Humane Society. They also recommend four types of toys for

dogs: at least one to carry, one to shake, one to roll and one to “baby,” for play and to release stress. Many dog toys should be interactive, to increase time with people. By focusing on a specific task—such as repeatedly returning a ball or playing hide-and-seek with treats or toys—dogs can take advantage of the opportunity to expend pent-up mental and physical energy.

Healthy and organic presents for pets are now widely available in neigh-

borhood natural pet stores, as well as online. At such shops, people and pets can check out the choices firsthand and seek advice from the staff. If there’s a toss-up between products, ask if a portion of the product sales goes to benefit animal causes, making it a gift that gives again. That could be the tiebreaker.

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Savvy Shopper Tips

Friendly Brands for Pets, People and the Planet

Looking for inspiring pet- and Earth-friendly gift ideas? Here is a list of the top six eco-friendly brands recommended by natural pet store owners in an informal survey. Other local natural pet stores will have additional appealing ideas and products.

WEST PAW DESIGN (WestPawDesign.com) – Look for hang tags that say “I used to be a plastic bottle,” on toys and bedding for cats and dogs. The Bumi boomerang invites pooches to bend and tug. The Hurley encourages an active canine to chew, bounce and float it, and even comes with a replacement guarantee. Cats take to their catnip toy mouse. And, if a pet tires of a West Paw Design toy, their Join the Loop program will recycle returned products into new pet toys.

PLANET DOG (PlanetDog.com) – Planet Dog eco-products range from recycled balls and bones to a Zoom Flyer for throwing and an after-bath towel for canine comfort. The company operates a foundation providing products and funding to worthy causes based on the philosophy, “Think Globally and Act Doggedly.”

KONG NATURALS (KongCompany.com) – Their eco-friendly line of cat toys feature straw cones with feathers, crinkle caterpillars and entertaining fantasy animals. Kong also offers cat scratchers made of recycled products, some reversible for longer wear, with feathers attached for play.

DUCKYWORLD (DuckyWorld.com) – If a fish-shaped toy with the aromatic name of “Yeowww! Stinky Catnip Sardines” brings a smile, consider DuckyWorld’s 100 percent organic, leaf- and flower-top catnip toy, grown by a private farmer with no chemicals or pesticides. Company owners swear cats can tell the difference.

THE GOOD DOG COMPANY (TheGoodDogCompany.com) – Innovation here includes two Labrador employees, Howard and Ruby, who “lab” test the company’s hemp toys, collars and leashes. Good Dog claims that its lab-sized hemp biscuits and bungee bone tug toy are good to fetch, catch and carry, and can even improve dental health.

SWEET FEET & BEAK (SweetFeetAndBeak.com) – If a favored pet is feathered, try this bamboo perch, which offers the gift of a daily calcium supplement, along with an ongoing pedicure for bird friends.

In the end, it’s all about just doing what comes naturally for all of our gift-giving.