

Bullies and Bedding

by Dede Wilson

Maybe your bull terrier is respectful of his bedding. Perhaps you can browse through catalogs and decide amongst the rectangular bolster style beds, plush-top rounds, orthopedic foam filled or even the corduroy and denim ones with zippers so that you can easily wash the covers. If your dog will sleep on one of these beds without destroying it, then you don't need to read this essay!

However, if your dear bull terrier would shred any and all fillings (cedar, polyester fluff, foam, beads, etc.), rip the zipper away and eat half of it or ingest any part of the inner or outer bed, then read on. If you have bought "guaranteed chew-proof" beds and are on your fourth one, then read on.

The first thing I want you to know is YOU ARE NOT ALONE. YOUR BULL TERRIER IS NOT A FREAK. Well, not a freak in the sense that he or she is not a unique aberrant example of the breed. Many bull terriers destroy their bedding and many owners have been in the same horribly expensive frustrating state that you are in right now. THERE IS HOPE.

If you have a more than one bull terrier in your home, or have had a few in your life, you know that one might be on a constant seek and destroy mission while others are A-OK with whatever you provide. In my opinion, the first thing you should do is let go of any obsession you might have as to figuring out why This dog does this and That one doesn't. Sometimes there is just no clear answer. Let's focus on solving your problem – and hopefully present some ideas so that you will be able to provide a bed for your dog.

And make no mistake, it is a problem that must be solved. Even if you have limitless resources and are willing to buy a bed every week for the rest of the dog's life, the fact is that most (although not all) shredders are eaters as well. They will eat bits and pieces of their bedding. This is another one of those bull terrier things that is impossible to figure out. Some dogs have eaten a washcloth-sized piece of fabric or a piece of zipper and with some efficient pooping, somehow survived. Others, very sadly, have been to death's door or beyond after ingesting a mere 2-inch square of cotton. It is simply too risky.

One approach to try is to buy a blanket that is "felted" and not woven. Most blankets are made of woven materials, where the very fabric is made up of strands going vertically as well as crosswise. The most obvious example of this is a loosely woven cotton blanket, where it is very easy to see the cotton strings going this way and that. But many other types of fabric that have tighter weaves, and are not so obvious, are woven as well. This type of blanket is a No-No for a chewer. If ingested, the fabric can unravel and the strands of material can create a blockage in the intestine. Felted fabric, on the other hand, just sort of falls apart if ingested in small

pieces. It is no guarantee that a dog cannot end up with an intestinal blockage if they eat parts of it, but many bull terrier owners have had success with this kind of blanket. One of my dogs eats tiny pieces of his felted blanket routinely and he passes them safely. That's the good news. The bad news is that in the spring, after the snow melts, I get to see the little pieces of the blanket all over the yard! So after a while the blanket looks moth eaten with holes and it is time to be replaced, but in the meantime, my dog has enjoyed months of cushiony bedding. Wal-Mart has these felted blankets and they come in twin and queen sizes in a variety of colors and sometimes patterns as well. They are meant for humans. They are a bit scratchy to me, but they are perfectly fine for the dogs. Simply cut away any binding along the edges. Some of them come with this and some don't. You can just cut with scissors, as felted fabric will not unravel. Wash before using and you are good to go. And the twin size is about \$5! They are not available on-line at this time. If you are in the store, look for the blankets labeled "Home Trends" (although this sometimes changes as well). As of this writing the UPC# for a twin is 8576998249.

Some bull terriers cannot even be trusted with these blankets. In this case you could try shredded newspaper or I know of one person who even uses straw. These were more or less last-ditch efforts to provide the dog with something, because the next step is no bedding at all. There are bull terriers out there that go into their Vari-Kennels with absolutely nothing to lie on – because they cant. Some folks might think this is "mean" but it is anything but. If you knew your dog was going to eat something that could create an intestinal blockage and threaten its life and you still provided it...well, that would be more than just foolish. It's like handing a child a toy you know is likely to hurt them. You don't do it.

I flew to Tampa for Eukanuba years ago and while I was waiting for our dogs to be brought out to the baggage area, an airline attendant and I were marveling at the number of dogs that were arriving. She pointed to a dog in a crate that had just been wheeled out on a dolly and the dog's bedding was indeed shredded newspaper. "Look at that," she said with a tsk tsk. "That poor dog's owner doesn't take very good care of it." I explained to her that the newspaper was a very good absorbent material and that perhaps the dog was a chewer. "It's really safer this way for the dog," I said. "In fact I'd say that owner is very much thinking about the dog's safety. Sometimes dogs that are not chewers turn into chewers when they are stressed, such as when flying". She nodded with a newfound understanding. Some dogs all of a sudden, even when at home in midst of their familiar routine, will turn into chewers, so be aware that this can happen.

On a closing note, my breeder Marion thinks that some dogs chew their beds because they don't like them - because they aren't nice enough☺. She has had dogs that were chewers until she gave them genuine, longhaired sheepskins to sleep on. As improbable as it sounds, they don't chew them and seem to love them! I have not tried to duplicate this approach. My closing statement is that you have to work with your individual dog. All of our bullies are unique and the arena of chewing is no

exception. You have to figure out what works for him or her. And if it's a bare crate that is the answer, so be it.