

Digging

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Digging is a normal behavior for dogs to engage in. Therefore, it is unreasonable to expect a dog to never dig. If you understand the different reasons why a dog may dig, it is easier to control this behavior so it doesn't damage the yard.

The 7 main types of digging are:

1. Digging from boredom or for fun.
2. Digging to hunt.
3. Genetic based digging.
4. Digging to bury something.
5. Digging to escape.
6. Digging to make a cool place.
7. Digging due to real or false pregnancy.

Until your dog is trained to not engage in unwanted digging in the yard, the dog needs to be kept in a location he cannot dig when left alone. A crate inside the house or a cement-floored dog run is ideal. The dog should only have access to the yard when being trained not to dig or when 100% effective digging deterrents are in place. It is important that the dog not be allowed to "practice" digging in the yard at times he cannot be corrected.

1. Digging from boredom or for fun:

This is probably the most common type of digging dogs engage in. Since most dogs do not receive enough physical exercise and mental stimulation, they will discover ways to use up the energy they have. Digging is a natural, enjoyable activity for dogs to engage in.

There is a great deal of truth to the phrase "A tired dog is a good dog." The more energy a dog uses doing activities like running, playing fetch and searching games, the less energy he'll have to dig. Therefore, the first step in alleviating the dogs boredom or fun digging is to make sure he is getting sufficient exercise. Giving the dog enough exercise to tire him twice daily, will go a long way to reduce boredom. Some dogs need to run for an hour before they become tired and others can get tired from 15 minutes of playing fetch. Take the breed of dog into consideration when starting an exercise program. A Siberian husky that was bred to run all day in the snow pulling a sled will need much more vigorous exercise than a Pomeranian. For more information on your dog's energy level based by breed, please e-mail info@k9west.net

At the same time you are increasing your dog's daily exercise, you can add other fun things for him to do in the back yard. Rotate a variety of appropriate chew toys for him every day. Purchase a Kong, a Boomer Ball and Buster Cube and show him how to use them. Build a digging pit as described in the solution for genetic based digging problems and use the various digging deterrents in the areas of the yard you don't want him to dig. Some simple deterrents include:

- a. Keeping the dogs nails well-manicured and short. Have a professional trim his nails regularly.
- b. Bury the dogs solid waste in all existing holes and cover the waste with no more than one inch of dirt.
- c. Bury Lava Rocks in existing holes. Cover with no more than one inch of dirt. You may also use the lava rocks as a kind of ground cover to make it uncomfortable for the dog to even walk in the areas he is likely to dig.
- d. Use spray deterrents like "Get off my Garden". These products can be toxic if water runs through the sprayed area and pools where the dog may drink the water..
- e. Set up a Radio Systems fence or other motion sensors to keep the dog out of likely digging areas.
- f. Set up upside down mouse traps in the digging areas so the dog will set off the traps when he starts to dig.
- g. Set up trip wires attached to shaker cans so they will tumble down on dog when he starts to dig.
- h. If you are actually watching the dog when he starts to dig, you can do many things to interrupt the digging behavior. You should interrupt him in a way so it will not be obvious that the correction is coming from you. Otherwise, the dog will learn that the only time it is not safe to dig is when you are around. Some examples of corrections include: blow an air horn, throw shaker cans, turn the sprinkler system on or squirt him with the hose or a squirt gun. Do not go over to the dog and "punish" him yourself. It will only cause him to become apprehensive of your approach and may damage his trust in you, rather than deter digging.

2. Digging to hunt:

The first step is to rid the yard of vermin like gophers and ground squirrels. A professional can do this in a way that is safe for the dog. Be extremely careful when using traps and poisons.

If there is a particular part of the yard that is impossible to rid of vermin, the Owners may need to set up a strong deterrent in that part of the yard. A Radio Systems fence may keep the dog away from the areas he's trying to dig for gophers or squirrels.

3. Genetic based digging:

Dog owners should understand that while all dogs can enjoy digging, there are certain breeds of dogs that have been bred to dig. All terriers and ground hunting hounds (Daschunds) fall into this category. Therefore, the most effective solution for these dogs

will include giving them a digging pit at the same time you implement digging deterrents in areas you don't want him to dig (see digging deterrents listed in solutions for boredom/fun digging). To make a digging pit, select an area of your yard that is comfortable for your dog. Not too hot, not under a rain gutter, not too loud etc. Block the area off with something heavy and durable like railroad ties or large stones. Dig up the dirt to loosen it and add sand if the dirt is clay-like. Keep the dirt loose and turned over. Have the dog watch the owners bury bones, baited Kongs and other treasures in the digging pit. You can also get rabbit scent from a hunting shop, place it on the end of a dowel and run it down into the loose dirt to create a scent trail.

The next step is to make the rest of the yard very unattractive for digging (see solutions listed in boredom/fun digging).

4. Digging to bury something:

Some dogs like to bury bones and other possessions. You can still give your dog things to chew on if you attach them to a post using a light tie out cable sold at Petco. Drill a hole through your dogs chew toys, run the cable through them and attach them to something solid. Make sure this is in a comfortable area for the dog. It shouldn't be too hot or cold or damp. Give him something comfortable to lie on while he chews.

Treat any existing holes by burying his solid waste and lava rocks and then covering with a little dirt. Top off with some spray deterrents.

5. Digging to escape:

If you notice that the dog only digs when you are gone and digs mostly at the gate or other areas where it appears that he is trying to get out, the dog may be digging because of separation anxiety. Therefore, you must address the dog's separation anxiety at the same time you implement the digging deterrents mentioned in boredom/fun digging.

Please call (775) 351-4854 or e-mail info@k9west.net for more information on separation anxiety. Separation anxiety can be very serious since dogs may become seriously injured in their attempts to escape from the yard.

Some dogs try to escape the yard by digging out but do not have separation anxiety. They are trying to get out of the yard because they are looking for a female in heat or want to re-mark their territory. Since these dogs are sometimes very persistent about escaping, the best option is spaying and neutering your dog. Spaying and neutering is healthier for your dog's overall well being, health and safety. – not to mention helping the pet-overpopulation problem plaguing the United States.

6. Digging to make a cool place:

Certain breeds are more adversely affected by the heat than others. Northern Breeds like German Shepherd dogs, Siberian Huskies and Malamutes are more inclined to dig holes in cool, shady areas in an attempt to escape the heat. Use the same deterrents described in the solution for boredom/fun digging and try to change the yard watering schedule to keep the area the dog is trying to dig in drier. Then, create another cool,

shady area. Home Depot or Lowe's carries misters that hook up to the water hose and spray a fine mist into the air. This lowers the temperature by 10-20 degrees in a matter of minutes and creates enough dampness to help deter flies. Hook this up under a shady place and provide a comfortable mat. Some dogs also enjoy a wading pool.

Some dogs also benefit from having a summer hair cut. Remember to use sunscreen on newly exposed skin and always put sunscreen on white dogs.

7. Digging because of false or real pregnancy:

Some dogs dig to nest when they are pregnant. If the dog is having a false pregnancy, take the dog to the veterinarian. The vet can help alleviate the symptoms of a false pregnancy. If the dog is truly pregnant, see your veterinarian to make sure the dog is healthy and to get professional advice about how to make a whelping box and deal with her nesting instincts.

Canine College West
“Turning Pests into Pets”
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