



Digging

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Dogs dig for a variety of reasons – boredom, cooling, escape, genetic, burying toys and bones or food, hunting, separation Anxiety.

We need to understand that often digging is really not the problem, but the symptom. The problem may be your dog is bored and needs more exercise or alternate things to do. The problem may also be your dog associates negative things with the back yard and needs to learn to associate the yard with positive things.

Digging is a behavior that more often than not happens when you are not around. Typically this is not because your dog is sneaky or attempting to get away with something, but because when you are there it often provides the stimulus necessary to prevent him from digging.

Unless you catch your dog in the act, correcting him is not only a waste of time but can be counterproductive. If you come home or go out in the back yard and discover he has dug a hole and you chastise the dog in any fashion you are teaching the dog to fear the back yard and or fear you coming home.

Boredom digging:

Most people WAY underestimate the amount of activity it takes to use up their dog's energy each day. Digging is often a way a dog occupies himself when left outside. Different breeds need different amounts of exercise, but if your dog is digging out of boredom, you can bet a 30 minute walk once a day is not enough exercise.

Engaging in appropriate activities in the back yard can decrease their urge to dig. Play with his chew toys and hide special treats in that area. Hidden treasures can keep him hunting instead of digging for hours. Teach the dog to find the hidden treasures by taking pieces of kibble, dog biscuits, toys and treat filled chew toys and hiding them in various places in the back yard. Then encourage him to find the items. Once he has learned to do this you can leave these items in their hidden places prior to leaving him alone. By rotating different toys and treats daily, your dog will have something exciting to do when you are not around. Maybe you could make 7 different toy bags and label them for each day of the week, put different toys in each bag and replace the toys every morning with the new days' toys. It is important to remove the toys when you get home, you don't want the dog to get bored with the toys.

A premium or more natural dog food can also help. Less expensive dog food can have a lot of chemicals and preservatives. Hidden sugars like beet pulp, sucrose, fructose, etc. can increase the dog's energy levels.

If your dog has one or two “favorite” places to dig, make them undesirable. Fill the hole with the dog’s feces and dirt making sure the feces is an inch or so under the dirt so the dog can smell it. Make sure the dog does NOT see you fill the holes. If the dog chooses a new place, repeat this process. Most dogs will give up after a week or two. This needs to be coupled with trying to fix the problem or the “why” the dog digs. If you don’t address the “why”, your dog may stop digging but start chewing the patio furniture instead.

Digging for Escape:

There are several reasons dogs escape – he is left alone for long periods of time with no interaction, no toys for him to play with, not enough exercise, the place he goes to when he escapes provides him with interaction and fun things to do, sexual roaming, fear of loud noises, separation anxiety.

Digging in the back yard is more likely to happen if the dog considers the back yard a place of banishment or punishment. Making the yard enjoyable for the dog can reduce the urge for the dog to escape. Play with your dog, rotate toys, feed your dog in the back yard and never use the back yard to scold your dog or as a punishment.

Steps to take in controlling this behavior – LOTS of exercise including playing ball or walking/jogging, practice obedience commands, spaying or neutering, desensitizing your dog to loud noises, teaching your dog to dig in a designated sand pit.

Digging because I am a terrier or just because it feels good – it is in most terriers’ DNA to dig and many other breeds enjoy it as well. The best option for a dog that is born to dig is to create a digging pit. Buy or build a sand box with a lid (you don’t want it to become the neighborhood litter box) and fill it with play sand. Hide new toys or big chew sticks or milkbones in the sand and encourage your dog to dig in the appropriate place. You can also get cardboard boxes and fill them with shredded paper and hide things in the paper and let your dog find the treasure. There is a little bit of clean up afterwards, but this is soooo fun and fulfilling for the dog!

Steps to take to prevent escape – put chicken wire along the edge of your fence fastening it to the fence and 2-3 foot inside the fence, lay chain link fence on the ground around the edge of your fence, place large rocks around the perimeter, keep your dog inside in a kennel or provide a run for your dog (make sure there is shelter and water available). Chaining your dog outside is not an option. Chaining your dog can be not safe, he can get tangled in a rope or chain very easily and harm himself or worse. It can also create very high frustration levels that can turn into self mutilation and aggressive behavior!

Punishment:

Never punish your dog after he has escaped. If you punish him after you go out and find him or if he has come home on his own, your dog will associate the punishment with you finding him (resulting in him hiding from you next time) or with him coming home (next time he may not come home if he is just going to get in trouble). It is best to ignore the

behavior then work on controlling and preventing the behavior. If your dog's escaping is fear based punishing him will only make him more fearful.