

AnimalFriends Presents

Dig This! Managing Your Dog's Digging Habit

Why do dogs dig? Who knows! Sometimes, when it's hot, they dig holes to lay in and escape the heat. Sometimes they just think it's fun. For some dogs, digging is ingrained in their breed and can feel like a fun, active job. Some dogs dig out of boredom. They're left alone in their yard with nothing to do, and digging is fun, so why not? Others go after moles or small animals in the yard.

Despite how your dog's digging makes you feel, he is not doing it out of spite or because he is angry with you. The bottom line is that some dogs dig.

At Animal Friends, our experience shows that punishment does not stop digging. You might be able to discourage your dog from digging in one spot in the yard, but he will find another place. No amount of punishment can prevent a dog from doing a behavior that is hard-wired into his brain.

A better alternative is to redirect his digging to an appropriate spot. Give him an acceptable outlet for this behavior.

Find a spot in your yard where you can tolerate digging. Place it near the garbage cans or in a corner behind some bushes. Prepare the spot to make it look appealing to him. Add some top soil and bury some biscuits or some of his favorite toys. Lead him over to the approved spot and encourage him to dig. When he starts, praise him. If you catch him trying to dig elsewhere, distract him and lead him over to the approved spot. Be careful not to be too rough in your distraction because you don't want him to become fearful.

How do you get your dog to dig in only one spot? This requires supervision. If your dog is left alone in an empty yard with no toys or humans to interact with, digging up your garden can become a pretty fun activity. Making this connection can take time and patience, but will be well worth it!

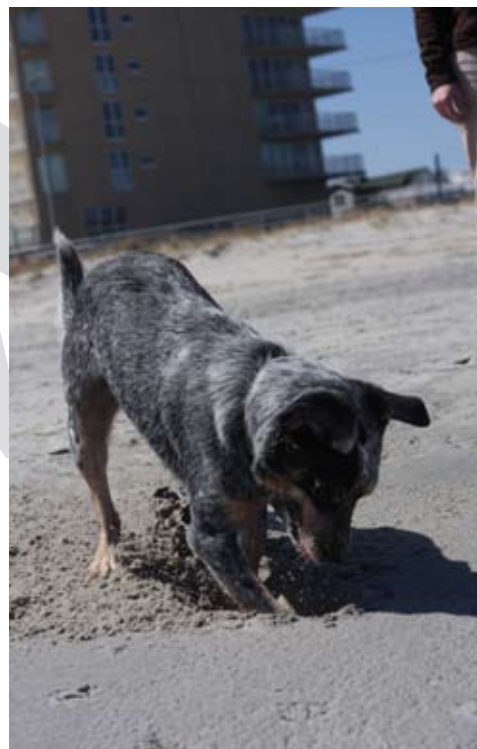
Also make sure that your dog is getting enough exercise. A bored dog with lots of excess energy can lead to destructive behaviors. Avoid these by:

- Providing at least one long walk each day (15-30 minutes depending on the dog); two walks are ideal with potty breaks spread out during the day.
- Provide a fenced-in-yard.
- Consider doggy day care facilities to keep your dog active all day long.
- Visit the dog park.
- Play frisbee!

Here are some more tips for managing the digging habit:

The Shelter-Seeking Digger

For dogs that are digging to provide shelter, perhaps from the heat or the cold, give him an appropriate shelter outside and reward him for using it. Insulated shelters away from the sun and wind are best. Even if your dog only spends short periods of time outside, providing shelter will keep him from making his own! Some dog owners find that placing a weather resistant bed outside or on a deck solves the digging problem. Why lay in dirt if a cushy bed is available?



The Attention-Seeking Digger

If it seems like your dog is digging just to get your attention, it is important not to reinforce the behavior by giving him attention! This goes for punishment also, since giving punishment provides the attention he seeks. Simply ignore the behavior, reward him when he stops, and provide him with alternative activities. Make sure you are spending enough quality time with your dog each day so that he doesn't have to resort to destructive behaviors.

The Escape Digger

Some dogs may dig along the edge of a fence if they are trying to escape. You can avoid this by placing chicken wire beneath the fence, placing large rocks at the edge of the fence, or having the fence begin two feet below the ground.

The Chasing-Prey Digger

If your dog is digging as a means of chasing rodents and bugs, restrict his access to the area or work on ridding your yard of the insects and animals. Make sure to always use products that are safe for both humans and animals.

Remember, ALWAYS use positive reinforcement techniques! Never punish a dog for digging, as it can lead to new and unique adverse behaviors, such as anxiety and fear.

Good luck and happy digging! To learn more, visit Animal Friends' website at www.ThinkingOutsideTheCage.org.

