

Animal Friends Presents Dig This! Managing Your Dog's Digging Habit

Does your dog dig? Are you finding craters in your backyard? As the ground thaws with warmer weather, you may find that your dog seems to be obsessed with trying to get to China.

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. 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.

Some old-fashioned dog training books recommend using punishment to stop the digging habit. They recommend such inhumane methods as filling the holes with water and putting your dog's head in it. They also recommend filling holes with stuff dogs find offensive, such as their poop. 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, guaranteed. 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. Since you're not likely to prevent a digger from digging, the best solution is to give him an appropriate 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. I chose to give my dog a raised flower bed. I cleaned it out, put new top soil in and let him go to town there. He was in Seventh Heaven!

How do you get your dog to dig in only one spot? This requires strict supervision. Your dog can't be expected not to dig when he's not being supervised. 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.

You can also try to increase your dog's exercise. A tired won't be as inclined to dig. Additionally, you can try to provide him with more backyard activities. Play with your dog when he is in the yard. Make sure there are plenty of dog toys in the yard to prevent boredom-inspired digging. 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?

If you do not heed our warning to supervise your dog, and you discover a hole he has dug when you were not watching him, here's our advice: get a newspaper, roll it up, and smack yourself on the hand, repeating, "I should have been watching my dog.....I should have been watching my dog....."

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