



## Solving Problem Digging

Is your dog's digging driving you to distraction? Digging is a natural behavior for dogs, but it can make us crazy if we let it. The first step in resolving your dog's problem digging is to figure out why it's happening.

Some of the solutions are the same no matter what the cause. For instance:

- ◆ Prevent your dog from having access to the places you don't want dug up (fence off your favorite flowerbeds, for example).
- ◆ Keep your dog inside when you can't be outside with them to supervise.
- ◆ Interrupt your dog if you catch them in the act of digging.
- ◆ Give your dog plenty of other options for entertainment, including a digging pit if possible.

Punishing your dog for digging, especially if you find holes they've made after they've done it, won't help. Instead, consider these specific causes for digging, then figure out the solutions from there.

### Why Your Dog Digs

#### Digging for Fun

If your dog is young and/or very active (like a dog of a herding or other working breed), is often left alone in the yard with nothing to do, or is of a breed type that was made for hunting (such as terriers or northern breeds), they may be digging for entertainment.

- ◆ Get your dog tired out before you leave them alone. Plenty of exercise before you go out will help your dog relax while you're gone.
- ◆ When you need to leave your dog alone, leave them in the house with appropriate entertainment (see "Inside or Outside Dog?")
- ◆ Provide better options for your dog to stay busy: plenty of interactive food-filled toys and safe chews, for example.
- ◆ Make a digging pit (see below) where your dog can indulge their instincts.

#### Digging for Comfort

Particularly in hot or cold weather, your dog might dig to make a comfortably cool, warm, or sheltered spot to rest in. Signs to look for: your dog spends a lot of time outdoors, doesn't have shelter that provides comfort and protection from the elements, or seems to lie in the holes they dig.

- ◆ Be sure your dog has shelter that protects them from sun, rain, wind, and cold if you have to leave them outside. That may mean an insulated dog house or a bed in sheltered spot.
- ◆ Allow your dog to create a comfortable resting spot in a digging pit (see below).

### **Digging to Hunt**

Any dog may dig after prey, such as moles, gophers, ground squirrels, or even bugs, although some breeds are more prone to it; terriers have been bred for generations specifically to hunt, after all. If your dog's digging looks like it follows the path of animals underground or is in an area that seems likely to have prey--for example, around roots--your dog may be following their natural predatory instincts.

- ◆ Use nontoxic, safe methods to rid your yard of your dog's prey, or prevent your dog's access to those areas when you aren't there to directly supervise them.

### **Digging to Escape**

If your dog digs under or along your fence line, they may be trying to get out. See "Escape Artists."

### **Digging for Attention**

Your dog can learn what works to get your attention--and attention, even when it's negative, is very valuable to your dog. If your dog has learned that digging gets you to pay attention (whether the attention is the kind you think they'd like or not!), you'll have to ignore them when they dig to get them to stop.

- ◆ Make sure to give your dog attention when they're doing what you like: not digging! Play fetch with your dog, spend time practicing tricks with them in the yard, give them exercise to get them tired.
- ◆ Then, if your dog begins to dig to get your attention, walk away. If the dog really wants your attention, they'll eventually give up and follow you. If the dog continues to dig in the absence of your attention they're probably digging for another reason.

### **Make a Digging Pit for Your Dog**

If your dog just loves to dig, you can choose a spot to make their very own digging pit. If you catch your dog digging outside their spot, immediately interrupt them, then bring them right over to the digging pit and encourage them to dig. Praise them for digging there--make it fun!

To get your dog started in your newly designated digging pit, load it with smelly, delicious treats such as liver bits, food, stuffed chews like Kongs, squeaky toys--things that your dog would like to find. At first, make sure you put some close to the surface so that your dog gets the idea, and be ready to let your dog know what you want until they understand, by catching them in the act if they dig outside their area and bringing them right over to the digging place to encourage and reward them for digging.

Put a border around the digging pit (like a wood frame or garden border) to clearly designate the area. Sand makes a good material for digging – it's inviting to the dog, and doesn't stick in their fur like dirt. Your dog will like it even more if you keep it damp. Be sure to cover it at night to keep cats from using it as a litterbox.

*For more information on behavior and training for dogs and cats, please visit our web site at [www.sspca.org/pet-carebehavior/](http://www.sspca.org/pet-carebehavior/).*