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## Digging Dogs!

Now the spring weather is here you're probably spending more time in the garden; as is your dog! The wonderful smells that come up after the rains can sometimes be irresistible to a dog as can the smell of fertilisers and other manure additives. If you are lucky you might just have a small hole scratched in the surface, but for those who have a dog that really likes to dig then you certainly know about it. The damage and expense can be quite considerable.

**The first step in treating digging is to determine the reason for the digging.** Most dogs dig because they are bored or anxious though some dogs dig as it is natural for their breed to dig (terriers, huskies etc). Some dogs dig to keep cool, dogs also dig to find smells or insects in the garden or lawn. And most dogs dig because it feels good, especially if they are anxious or bored.

It is important to treat the cause of the problem, rather than just treating the symptom of digging.

Deal with any anxiety problems. See your vet or behaviourist if they are anxious, as just increasing the toys or enrichment is not always enough; especially if they are too anxious to eat and / or play while you are out. If a dog is only destructive or escapes when you are out, the problem is most likely to be separation anxiety which needs treatment.

Some management strategies whilst undergoing treatment or training can be to get someone to come in and dog sit, walk them for you when you are out, or to come in and check on them. It can also help to secure them indoors or in a safe area with plenty of enrichment but do get advice first. If a dog is very anxious they may get worse if confined.

If they are digging for insects, prey or smells then remove or treat the source. If it's on the grass you may wish to place heavy wire over the area of lawn (grid type wire fencing is best) move it every day or two so the sun and water gets through.

Be mindful of using fertilisers. Dogs are sometimes tempted to eat fertiliser which can make them quite ill, plus if buried in the garden the smell of some fertilisers may encourage digging.

Make sure the dog is given plenty of exercise and mental stimulation. Just toys in the yard are not enough for most dogs. They need enrichment; both physical and mental (see booklet 101 ways to keep your dog entertained for ideas; you can contact us to obtain an intro, sample of the booklet). Mental enrichment & problem solving can wear out a dog very effectively!

Don't feed bones if they bury them. Find alternatives that they are more likely to chew straight away. Some suitable alternatives may be lamb necks, chicken frames, pigs' ears, dental bones or sweet potato chews.



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Create an area where the dog can dig. It should be shaded & cool. Consider a digging pit such as the clamshell toys for children. In summer you could use the other clamshell for water or use one to cover the other over when it's not needed.

Fence off important areas in your yard & encourage the dog to use other areas. You can use deterrents such as D-Ter but the success of deterrents alone is quite variable.

All dogs will benefit from increased exercise and mental stimulation. Make sure you give them positive feedback for when they are doing the right thing. Set them up for success so that damage is limited and both you and your dog are happy.

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