

UNDERSTANDING THE DOG WHO DIGS

Digging is instinctive for dogs and is a trait that was inherited from their wild counterparts during their evolution and domestication. Our companion dogs do not need to dig for the same reasons their wild counterparts do, however, most of them enjoy it.

While digging is a completely normal activity for your dog, it can be upsetting and irritating to you. Whatever the reasons for your dog's digging, it is important that you don't punish her during or even after the fact. Punishment will not address the cause of your dog's digging behavior - and if the digging is motivated by fear or anxiety, punishment will make the situation even worse.

COMMON CAUSES OF DIGGING

- Comfort & Protection - Digging holes to cool/warm themselves, or in an attempt to find shelter from wind, rain or snow.
- Scent(s)/Hunting - The scent or sound of a wild critter running on top of the ground or burrowing underground.
- Anxiety - Digging can be a self-soothing behavior for a dog that has separation anxiety.
- Escape - Digging to escape confinement.
- Boredom/Entertainment - Digging to provide themselves with an activity when alone.
- Genetics/Instinct - Some breeds of dogs such as Terriers, Hounds and Spitz's are genetically predisposed to digging.
- Hidden Treasures - Burying a "coveted" item to save for later or to protect from other animals in the home.
- Mating/Whelping - Female dogs may dig holes as a part of mating/whelping behavior.

COMMON CAUSES OF DIGGING

- Comfort & Protection - Bring your dog inside during times of inclement weather or provide an appropriate area outside with protection from the sun, snow, wind and rain.
- Scent(s)/Hunting - Supervise your dog's outdoor time and redirect her to another activity if you notice her tracking a scent or starting to dig.
- Anxiety - If your dog suffers from separation anxiety, utilize the help of qualified trainer to work a behavioral protocol or provide alternatives to leaving your alone such as doggie daycare or pet sitter.
- Escape - If your dog only digs to escape confinement take the necessary steps to escape-proof your yard and offer your dog plenty of alternatives to keep her busy such as stuffed Kongs & toys. Unaltered dogs may try to escape in an attempt to find a mate, and spaying/neutering can help to lessen this behavior.
- Boredom/Entertainment - Provide your dog with plenty of mental and physical stimulation when



she has to be alone. See our Canine Enrichment [Tip Sheet](#) and [Companion Video](#) on our website for some ideas on activities to help keep your dog stimulated.

- Genetics/Instinct – Provide your dog with an “approved” digging site in your yard. See below for how to make a Dig Pit and train your dog to use it.
- Hidden Treasures – Provide your dog with an “approved” area in your yard in which to bury items. See below for how to make a Dig Pit and train your dog to use it.
- Mating/Whelping – If your female dog is pregnant, provide her with an appropriate whelping area. Speak with your veterinarian for the best way to set this area up.
- Management Options – Placing a heavy item (such as a brick, paver stone, etc.) over the preferred area of digging may help short-term while you work on training.

MAKING & USING A DIG PIT

Creating a Dig Pit can be a great way to enrich your dog’s environment and can also provide a solution for dogs that naturally like to dig. Because digging can be self-rewarding in dogs and many find it enjoyable, digging can prove difficult to control or stop. One of the best ways to prevent your dog from digging in inappropriate places is to give your dog a place where she is encouraged and allowed to dig.

To begin, identify an area in your yard where your dog can dig. Visually define the area with a border of rocks, wood or other type of short fencing. Fill the area with a combination of fine dirt and sand, which will facilitate easier digging for your dog.

Like most things, dogs will have to be trained to use the dig pit. The easiest way to do this is to bury a few of your dog’s favorite toys inside the area. This encourages your dog to dig to “discover” the toys. Sit with your dog while she digs the toys up and then offer ample praise and a yummy treat for her efforts. When your dog has uncovered all the buried toys, re-bury them deeper and encourage her to dig for them once more.

By hiding exciting surprises in the digging pit, you teach your dog that it is more rewarding to dig there than it is to dig in the middle of the yard or in your flower bed. Over time, your dog will learn to associate the digging pit with excitement and fun. To keep the digging pit exciting, hide new toys and treats often.

MY DOG WON’T USE THE DIG PIT

If you have built a dig pit but your dog is still tearing up the yard or the flower bed, it is time to troubleshoot. Some dogs do not understand that it is okay to dig in one place but not in others. To rectify this problem, supervise your dog’s outside time. If she begins to dig in any place other than the Dig Pit, redirect her attention by calling her name and guiding her to the dig pit (you can use a few treats to help lure her there).

If your dog is not interested in digging in the dig pit at all, bury more toys or make the toys easier to access by burying them at a shallower depth. Try burying food treats as well, as these will often capture a dog’s attention.

Although redirecting your dog to appropriate digging areas may take some time, pet parents who are consistent in this practice will eventually find that their dog is happy to dig in the dig pit and leave the yard or flower bed alone.

