

## Digging

### The Problem

No one wants to go outside to enjoy a nice glass of iced tea on the back porch, only to find that Rover has excavated five new spots in the garden, flinging dirt and formerly beautiful flowers all over the lawn and creating hazards for the unwary. In the wild, dogs often dig to make a cool or warm place to shelter in. Domestic dogs that dig often do it out of boredom, because they are confined to the back yard with no entertainment offered, and must find ways to entertain themselves. When dogs are forced to entertain themselves, they almost always aggravate the humans; after all, dogs can't read, operate a remote control, or go down to the coffee house to chat with their friends. Instead, dogs chew, bark, or dig for recreation.

### The Solution

If the dog is confined outside unsupervised for more than just a few minutes, she might be digging to provide a warming den or cooling pit. She should be provided with a shelter, even if she is not an "outside" dog, if she will be outside by herself for any significant period of time.

The most likely reason for digging, though, is boredom. The easiest solution is to bring the dog inside whenever she cannot be supervised outside (management), and to provide appropriate entertainment for her (environmental enrichment) when she is outside. The best entertainment is a variety of stuffed chew toys for her to gnaw on until she gets tired and naps for the day. Most dogs who are confined outside when their owners are away can't be left inside because they can't be trusted – either because they soil the house, or because they chew on everything in sight, or both.

The solution to most digging problems, then, is house training and chew toy training. If the dog is house trained, she can be trusted to stay indoors without leaving a very unpleasant surprise for her owners when they arrive home. If she is chew toy trained, she will seek out appropriate things to chew when she is bored: so she can be trusted inside, and she can entertain herself in an appropriate way.

Voila! The garden is inaccessible (except when the dog's owner is outside playing with her, or idly scratching her head), the dog is comfortable, and she has a variety of fun and approved toys to amuse herself with. If the dog must be left outside for reasons other than house training or chewing issues, she should be provided with a comfortable den, a dog run in which she has plenty of room to romp about, and a variety of toys, many of them stuffed chew toys, so that she can amuse herself by chewing on the approved toys rather than by digging. Gardens, flowerbeds, and other areas the owner wishes to protect should be fenced off.

### It's Still Not Working

For dogs who still dig whenever they get the chance, despite having a comfortable place to rest and plenty of approved and amusing toys to play with, the owner might want to consider a digging pit. This is a place in the yard that she decides will be the appropriate, and the only appropriate, place to dig.

First, select a place in the yard that the dog may dig, you only need about 3 square feet of space. Stock that place with lots of delicious and exciting things to find – like liver treats, some kibble, squeaky toys, stuffed chew toys, maybe even some meaty bones. At first, put some smelly things near the top, or even show the dog that you're putting the prize in. Once the dog learns that this particular area is chock full of great prizes, he will much rather dig there than anywhere else.

You must spend some time outside at first showing your dog the rules of the yard. Help her to get acquainted with the digging pit, and gently but firmly redirect her to the digging pit if she starts to dig elsewhere.

Once the dog learns that you would like him to dig in this one particular spot, and that this spot is the most exciting place to dig (here one finds liver treats and stuffed chew toys; elsewhere in the yard one is lucky to find a worm or a rock), he will direct himself to the digging pit whenever he gets the urge to go excavating.