



Jasper County Animal Rescue League and Humane Society
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Digging in Dogs

Why do dogs dig?

Digging behavior in dogs can have many motivations.

- Some breeds, such as the Northern breeds (Huskies, Malamutes) dig cooling holes and lie in them.
- Breeds such as the terriers have been bred to flush out prey or dig for rodents.
- Dogs dig for fun.
- Dogs dig to escape from confinement.
- Digging may also be an activity that occurs when pets are left alone with insufficient stimulation or attention. This is particularly so in puppies and in highly energetic dogs.

How can I determine why my dog is digging?

The first step in treating inappropriate digging behavior is to determine the reason for digging. Prevention, remote punishment, and booby traps may also be needed, but reducing your dog's motivation to dig, and providing for all of its needs are essential so that digging is not merely redirected to a new location. Inhibiting or preventing all digging, without understanding and dealing with the dog's motivation could result in new behavior problems such as chewing, excessive vocalization, or escape behaviors.

Your dog may be digging for a cool spot to lie if:

- The digging occurs near building foundations or at the base of trees.
- Your dog is a northern breed with lots of fur.
- You find evidence that the dog is laying in the holes he digs.

What you can do:

- Provide the dog with shelter that protects him from the wind and sun.
- Make sure the area provides plenty of shade and that the dog has access to fresh water.
- Consider bringing your dog inside on very hot or cold weather days.

Your dog may be digging for prey if:

- The dog is a terrier or terrier mix breed.
- He is digging in specific areas like at the roots of trees or shrubs.
- The digging is in a path layout.

What you can do:

- Eliminate the prey from your yard in way that is safe for the pet.

Your dog may be digging for attention if:

- He digs in your presence.
- He has been rewarded before for digging by receiving your attention even if it is negative attention.

What you can do:

- Provide appropriate outlets for the dog's energy by increasing his people time. Spend at least 20 minutes twice a day playing fetch or hide and seek with your dog
- Walk your dog daily. This is a good way to exert physical and mental energy for both of you.
- Give your dog positive attention when he is behaving appropriately.

- Take your dog to obedience classes and practice the new commands every day.
- Do not give the dog any attention when he is digging, even negative.

Your dog may be digging for fun if:

- Holes are found randomly throughout the yard.
- The dog is left alone for long periods of time without supervision.
- The environment is sterile with little or nothing for the dog to do.
- He is a very active type dog or is an adolescent (3 years or under).
- He has recently seen you dig for fun like when you are gardening.

What you can do:

- Take your dog to Bone Jour dog day care a few times a week to break up the routine.
- Provide the dog with appropriate busy toys. Kong type toys that you can stuff food treats in will reward and encourage the dog to play with his toys. (See our Dog Toys handout)
- Take the dog obedience classes and practice the new commands daily.
- Provide appropriate outlets for the dog's energy by increasing his people time. Spend at least 20 minutes twice a day playing fetch or hide and seek with your dog.
- Provide a digging area – For some dogs it may be useful for you to create an area where the dog is allowed to dig. Make this place somewhere that your dog would like to dig in. Bury things there that your pet would like to dig up. This might be food, lightly covered. Then put things deeper into the ground. If you do that (naturally when your dog is not watching!) at irregular intervals, your dog should be more likely to dig there, than other locations in your yard.
- Supervision and punishment - Supervision and direct intervention (shaker can, verbal reprimand, water rifle) can be used to prevent inappropriate digging in the owner's presence but the behavior will likely continue in the owner's absence. Remote punishment (turning on a sprinkler, pulling on an extended leash, a remote collar), booby traps (placing chicken wire, rocks or feces in the area where the pet digs), or covering the surface with one that is impervious (asphalt/patio stones) might teach the pet to avoid the digging site even in the owner's absence. These techniques do not however prevent the pet from digging in other locations.

Your dog may be digging to escape if:

- The holes are near or under the fence

What you can do:

- Take your dog to Bone Jour dog day care a few times a week to break up the routine.
- See our handout Escaping from the Yard.
- While you are working on the problem you can
 - bury chicken wire along the bottom of the fence
 - bury the bottom of the fence two feet under the ground
 - place large rocks along the fence line

What else can be done if inappropriate digging continues when I am not around to supervise?

When you are unavailable to supervise your dog, housing the dog indoors is the most practical solution until he or she has learned to stay outdoors without digging. If you would like to continue to leave him outdoors, it is best to confine the dog to an area such as a pen or run, so that he has no access to the digging areas. The run should be inescapable, and could be covered with gravel, patio tiles or have an asphalt or concrete floor so that it cannot escape or do damage. Of course it will be necessary to provide sufficient exercise and stimulation before confining the dog and an adequate number of treats and play toys in the run to keep the dog occupied. Another alternative is to provide an area within the pen or run where digging is allowed.

What NOT to do:

- Do NOT punish the dog after the fact. Dogs cannot correlate punishment with a behavior that happened even a few minutes ago.