

DIGGING

Why dogs dig.

Because it's fun. Dogs love to bury or recover bones, dig out prey like mice and rats, or make a nice cooling pit when the weather is warm. Another reason dogs dig? Too much time spent alone in the yard.

It's not a behavior problem.

Digging is normal canine behavior and, again, thoroughly enjoyable for the dog. If you have a digger on your hands, give him a place to indulge his hobby.

What to do.

Step 1: *Break the habit.* Is your dog digging in all the wrong places? If so, prevent his access. Your dog won't learn new ways while he has free access to his old digs—digging is just too much fun! Prevention is better still, and easier. If your dog has yet to dig up the roses, don't wait for him to discover how much fun it is. Teach him where to dig from day one.

Step 2. *Supervise.* Early on, don't use the yard for alone-time. Give your dog ample time to learn where he is allowed to dig before you leave him out there unsupervised. Otherwise it is too easy for him to make mistakes. (If you need to leave your dog alone, use his confinement area in the house. Give him plenty of chew toys for company.)

Step 3. *Create a digging area.* Make a dig pit or use a large pot with loose potting soil. A dig pit can be a sandbox or a 3-by-6 foot area in your yard. Loosen about 2 feet of earth, and remove any nails or wire or such. A little sand mixed in helps drainage when it rains. Then:

- Let your dog see you barely hide a Kong or Nylabone or some other treasure. Encourage him to find the toy and praise him when he does.
- Gradually cover the toys with more dirt every time. Keep praising.
- Every now and then hide something new and exciting to keep your dog coming back for more.

Step 4. *Interrupt mistakes.* Calmly stop any unauthorized digging, then lead your dog to his dig pit or digging pot. And yes, this means you need to be around when your dog is playing outside—at least until he knows where it is okay to dig and where it isn't.

Training Tip: If your dog has developed a liking for a particular spot in your yard, block access to that spot until he has had time to form new and better habits.

Training Tip: Digging is often a symptom of boredom—too much time spent in the yard alone. Make sure your dog is getting enough exercise and interaction.