

digging challenges

dog training basics

Some dogs may never dig. Others may give good imitations of canine earth movers. Whether in the couch or among your prize roses, digging can be quite destructive. Training and management are the best ways to deal with dogs who love to dig.

How training works:

Proper training is essential for a long, happy and safe relationship with your dog, setting the foundation to ensure your dog stays physically fit, mentally alert, socially engaged and emotionally happy. To make dog training an enjoyable and fulfilling activity, a great choice is to use a positive reinforcement approach that is rewards-based, fun and effective. Dog training based on using positive reinforcement helps pet parents understand how dogs think, learn and communicate. In turn, the pet parents will understand how to encourage and reward appropriate and polite dog behaviors for real-life situations. This builds and nurtures the bond between the pet parent and their dog.

It is scientifically proven that animals will learn a new behavior faster and more successfully if they are allowed to voluntarily participate in the learning process and are rewarded for preferred behaviors. Families have the best relationships with their dogs if they act as kind, benevolent influences for the family and help their dogs understand their role in the household. Dogs feel safest and most confident knowing their pet parents are making the decisions and setting boundaries. Puppies that work for all the good things in life are more confident, attentive, polite, respectful and connected to their family.



Developed with and approved by a qualified veterinarian.

Know your breed:

All dogs dig, but some breeds are more prone to digging than others. Some breeds have been bred to dig, including:

Terriers:

Terrier literally means “earth dog.” These dogs were bred to “go to ground,” digging down into rodent tunnels to chase out and corner the inhabitants. The need to dig can be very strong in these breeds, so you may want to do extra research on how to best train and manage these breeds’ digging instincts.

Sledding dogs:

Dogs that were bred to survive arctic-type environments needed a strong instinct to burrow down into the snow to survive the long, cold nights. Although your husky or malamute may not have ever seen temperatures below freezing, those instincts may still run strong. Dirt is just as rewarding to dig in as snow.

Highly intelligent dogs:

Dogs that are kept in a backyard with little or no stimulation may invent games to keep themselves entertained. One of the favorites, along with barking, is digging. Keeping this type of dog entertained with training, activities and plenty of quality time with you will help minimize unwanted digging.

Common reasons for digging:

Isolation is the most common reason. A dog left alone for long periods of time is lonely and bored and will often come up with activities such as digging. The more time the dog spends with you, the less likely they are to dig. When you’re home, make sure to spend quality time together.

If dogs are not spayed or neutered, they may do anything (like digging) to escape and breed. Alter your dog, or at least keep your female inside (preferably in a crate) when in heat.

Children playing next door or people walking by can frustrate your dog. Your dog hears all the fun but can’t join in, and gets more and

more agitated and must relieve stress somehow. Digging serves as a physical outlet both to relieve frustration and get out of the yard. Leave your dog with a favorite chew toy, and let them learn to settle down and accept that you are gone. Start with short periods of time.

Do you have gophers or ground squirrels? Dogs (especially dachshunds and terriers) find rodents hard to resist. Be careful with poisons and traps so that your dog is not harmed.

Many canines will dig a hole under a bush or against a wall to lie in during hot weather. Instinct tells them to build a “den” to keep cool. If this isn’t acceptable, get a doghouse and put it in the shade to satisfy this denning instinct. Or get a child’s play pool and fill it with a few inches of sand/dirt for an allowed place to dig so your dog can cool off during the day.

Exercise may be a good outlet for the digger to channel energy into a fun activity. Walks, games of fetch, training classes and other activities may make it easier for your dog to relax when it’s time to settle down.

Additional solutions:

Install a pet door so your dog can come and go as they please. This is often reassuring to the dog and relieves the boredom and frustration of being left outside.

Create a digging pit for your dog. Mark off an area with boards where it is okay to dig. Partially bury a few bones or other smelly treats, encouraging digging there. Your dog will get the idea quickly. This is especially effective for instinctive diggers such as terriers and arctic breeds.

