



## Digging

Digging is a very natural behavior for dogs. Some dogs are genetically predisposed to digging, while others dig to relieve boredom or anxiety. While digging is normal dog behavior, it may not be acceptable in your back yard or flower garden and can lead to danger if your pet escapes by digging under a fence.

### Why Do Dogs Dig?

Dogs left outside alone for long periods of time generally do not exercise on their own, nor are they interested in playing by themselves. Often dogs will dig out of boredom or to burn off excess energy.

If your dog is digging under the fence to escape, either the environment outside your yard is much more interesting to him than the yard, or he is attempting to escape the isolation of the yard, possibly to get to you, the owner.

In the summer months, dogs may dig to find cool spots in which to lie or they may be seeking interesting things buried in the ground, such as bugs and worms. Sometimes digging is just plain fun!

### An Ounce of Prevention

If your dog usually starts digging after half an hour on his own, bring him inside after 25 minutes. It is often easier to teach a dog appropriate behavior in the house than to try to correct problem behaviors, like digging, which occur when you are not present.

### The Digging Pit

By providing an acceptable area where your dog may dig, you can satisfy his urge and save the rest of your yard! Your dog's "digging pit" may be a sandbox, a plastic "kiddy" pool filled with dirt, or just an area of Mother Earth. Teach him to dig in the designated area by showing him the area and having him watch you bury "treasures" there like treats, food, or toys. Bury them shallow initially and help your dog dig them up. Once he gets the idea, you can bury them deeper and eventually he will automatically go to his digging spot to look for treats as a matter of habit. Be sure to keep the digging pit well stocked so he has no reason to dig elsewhere.

Also be prepared to spend some time with your dog outside, redirecting him if he goes to his "old stomping grounds" to dig rather than his approved area.

If you see your dog digging in an inappropriate area, you can give a verbal reprimand such as, "No! Pit!" and immediately direct him to the appropriate spot. Don't forget to praise him when he is excavating a treasure you have buried in his approved digging area!

***Never physically punish your dog for digging, and never show him the hole after he's dug it then punish him.*** He will not understand why he is being punished and you may ruin your opportunity to encourage him to dig in the approved area since he will avoid digging in your presence.

## **Escape Behavior**

If your dog is digging under fences or by doors to escape the yard, a digging pit may not work. If he is not neutered, he may be trying to escape in search of female dogs in heat. Neuter your dog! If he is attempting to escape because the neighborhood is more interesting than your yard, try taking him on regular walks. It will expend some of his energy and he may be more content to stay at home. Playing games with your dog in the yard, such as fetch or hide and seek with a toy, will also exercise his muscles and his mind. Contrary to popular belief, dogs generally do not exercise on their own in the backyard... they need interaction with you!

If your dog is digging to get to you, he may be suffering from separation anxiety. If that is the case, let your dog inside before the digging behavior starts, and never leave him outside if you are not home. Dogs with separation anxiety have been known to dig out of yards and attempt to follow their owner's cars.

If your dog becomes anxious when separated from you to the point that he is hurting himself or destroying the yard and home, please seek the advice of a qualified Behavior Consultant.

## **When All Else Fails**

You can try making the areas where you don't want your dog to dig as unpleasant as possible. Try burying pine cones or things that will not feel pleasant on his feet when digging, but that will not hurt him. Also, burying your dog's feces in the holes will likely discourage digging in that area since dogs are generally clean animals and don't like to touch their feces.

With a little time and consistency in training, you should be able to share your yard in harmony with your dog.

For more information about pet behavior and training, please call **visit our website at [michiganhumane.org](http://michiganhumane.org)**.