

Digging

Digging is a common, normal, and self-rewarding behaviour. In order to solve the problem of unwanted digging you must first identify the cause of the problem.

Reasons for Digging

- It may be innate as some dogs such as terriers were bred to dig
- Digging to relieve boredom as it's all alone and there's nothing else to do
- Digging to relieve stress and anxiety
- Digging to release excess energy
- Digging just for fun and entertainment
- Digging to create a space for warmth or shelter
- Digging a cooling pit on hot days
- Digging for water
- Digging for vermin that they smell under the ground
- Digging up other scents in the ground
- Burying food or other items
- Digging to escape the yard or dog run
- Your dog saw you digging and is imitating you
- Attention getting behaviour

Solutions

- Meet all your Dog's Needs – Make sure you're meeting all your dogs' needs including quality time, exercise and mental stimulation. (See *"Meeting Your Dog's Needs"* handout)
- Remove the Stress – Remove as much stress as possible from your dog's life to reduce the possibility of digging as stress and anxiety relief.

Digging

- No Punishment – Punishment will increase your dog’s stress and anxiety and increase stress relieving behaviours as well as jeopardizing your trust bond and your dog’s temperament.
- Environmental Management – Set up your yard to prevent unwanted digging and provide your dog with plenty of acceptable ways to release its energy such as toys and chew options. Make sure your yard is a happy and comfortable place for your dog.
- Ignore Attention Getting Behaviour – If your dog is digging for attention set up your yard for success so it can’t get in trouble. Ignore all attention-getting behaviour and reward your dog with attention for behaviours you like.
- Supervision – Supervision is crucial until the problem is solved as digging is a self-rewarding behaviour that becomes more deeply rooted the longer it occurs. It takes approximately six weeks to replace a deeply rooted behaviour with a new one.
- Exercise – Provide sufficient exercise because a tired dog will be more relaxed and less likely to feel the need to dig. And as we know, tired dogs get in less trouble.



- Keep your dog Busy – Give your dog something else to do such as toys to play with or safe things to chew on. (See “*Chewing Options*” handout)
- Block Access – If your dog only digs in one area block your dog’s access to that area and give it something else to do.

Digging

- Digging Box – Provide an acceptable outlet by supplying a digging box. Counter sink pieces of wood into the ground or provide a children’s plastic pool and fill it with sand. Bury your dog’s favourite toys, safe bones and/or treats in the digging pit then show your dog the buried treasures. Your dog will be drawn to the digging pit if it’s rewarded for the behaviour on a regular basis. Any time your dog attempts to dig in an inappropriate place re-direct it to its digging box and reward it for digging there.
- Chicken Wire – Place chicken wire on the ground where your dog digs then allow the grass to grow over and through the chicken wire. Make sure the wire is low to the ground and that all edges are counter sunk into the ground to prevent getting caught up in the blades of your lawn mower.
- Fencing – Use fencing to block your dog from the area where it tends to dig.
- Extermination or Relocation – If your dog is digging for vermin, the vermin should be blocked out or removed from your yard. Avoid using anything that may be toxic or dangerous to your dog.
- Interrupt & Redirect – When your dog sniffs the area where it prefers to dig, interrupt it and redirect it to something else such as playing with a favourite toy or something to chew on. Just make sure you supervise to prevent it from burying the toy or chew toy.



George – Compliments of Janet Greenwood

- Provide Comfort – If your dog is digging an area for warmth or cooling, provide comfortable shelter, a doghouse or bring your dog inside. Your dog should be comfortable at all times. If it’s too hot or cold for you, in many cases it will be the same for your dog.

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- Provide Water – Make sure your dog has plenty of water in a container that can't be knocked over.
- Boundary Training – If your dog digs around or under your fence you can boundary train your dog to teach it to stay away from the parameter of your yard. (see “*Boundary Training*” handout)
- Secure your Yard or Dog Run – For dogs that dig to escape their yard or dog run, secure the parameter. (See below)

Sylvia's Escape-Proof Run

- Dig a trench along the fence line approximately 2” to 4” wide, and deep enough to sink garden-edging stones at least three inches below the surface.
- Sink the garden edging stones (min 6” high) into the trench along the edge of the fence, leaving at least 3” above the ground.



Sylvia's Escape-Proof Run

- Using half inch metal hook nails, hook the fence with the nail, and hammer the sharp end into the garden edging stones to secure the fence to the stones.
- Fill in the trench with soil, gravel or concrete.

