



Dig This: How to Get Your Dog to Stop Digging

You can have a dog and a nice yard at the same time—sometimes, it just takes a little effort.

Has your dog turned your yard into a moonscape with craters everywhere? If so, the first thing you should know is that your dog isn't doing this out of spite or a desire to destroy your landscaping.

Entertainment

Dogs may dig for entertainment when they learn that roots and soil "play back." Your dog may be digging for entertainment if:

- They're left alone in the yard for long periods of time without the company of their human family.
- Their environment is relatively barren—with no playmates or toys.
- They're a puppy or adolescent and don't have other outlets for their energy.
- They're a terrier or other breed that was bred to dig.
- They're an active breed who needs a job to be happy.
- They've recently seen you gardening or working in the yard.

What to do

Expand your dog's world and increase their people time in the following ways:

- Walk your dog at least twice daily. Lack of exercise is a leading cause of problem behaviors.
- Play with them using active toys (balls, flying disks) as often as possible.
- Teach your dog a few commands or tricks. Practice these every day for 5 to 10 minutes.
- Take a training class with your dog and practice what you learn daily.
- Keep interesting toys in the yard to keep your dog busy when you're not around. Kong®-type toys filled with treats or busy-box dog toys work especially well. Rotate the toys to keep things interesting.

Hunting prey

Dogs often dig in an effort to catch burrowing animals or insects who live in your yard. This may be the case if the digging is:

- Focused on a single area rather than the boundaries of the yard.

- At the roots of trees or shrubs.
- In a "path" layout.

What to do

Search for signs of burrowing animals, then use safe, humane methods to fence them out, exclude them or make your yard or garden unattractive to them.

What not to do

Don't use any product or method that could be toxic or dangerous to your pets or other animals. Anything that poisons wildlife can poison your dog, too.

Comfort and protection

In hot weather, dogs may dig holes to lie in the cool dirt. They may also dig to provide themselves with shelter from cold, wind or rain or to find water. Your dog may be digging for comfort or protection if:

- The holes are near the foundations of buildings, large shade trees or a water source.
- Your dog doesn't have a shelter or their shelter is too hot or cold.
- Your dog lies in the holes they dig.

What to do

Provide your dog with the comfort or protection they seek. Bring them inside more often, and make sure their outdoor shelter is comfortable, protected against heat and cold, and has access to water in an un-tippable bowl. If your dog is still a dedicated digger, try setting aside a digging zone.

Attention

Any behavior can become attention-getting behavior if the dog learns that they receive attention for engaging in it. Remember, even punishment is attention. Your dog may be looking for attention if they dig in your presence or have limited opportunities for interaction with you.

What to do

Ignore attention-seeking behavior and give your pooch a lot of praise for "good dog" behavior. Also, make sure your dog has enough walk and play time with you on a daily basis.

Escape

Dogs may try to escape to get to something, to get away from something or get somewhere. Your dog may be digging to escape if they dig under or along a fence.

What to do

Figure out why your dog is trying to escape and remove those incentives. Make sure their environment is a safe, appealing place for a dog.

To keep your dog in your yard:

- Bury chicken wire at the base of the fence. Be sure to roll the sharp edges away from your yard.
- Place large rocks, partially buried, along the bottom of the fence line.
- Bury the bottom of the fence 1 to 2 feet below the surface.
- Place chain-link fencing on the ground (anchored to the bottom of the fence) to make it uncomfortable for your dog to walk near the fence.
- Work with your dog on behavior modification to stop their escape efforts.

What doesn't work

Regardless of the reason your dog is digging, don't:

- Punish your dog after the fact. This won't address the cause of the behavior, and it will worsen any digging that's motivated by fear or anxiety.
- Stake out your dog near a hole they've dug or fill the hole with water.

Punishing your dog after the fact never works.

Next steps: A digging zone

If your dog is a dedicated digger, set aside an area of the yard where it's okay for them to dig, and teach them where that digging zone is:

- Cover the digging zone with loose soil or sand. Or use a child-size sandbox.
- Make the digging zone attractive by burying safe items (such as toys) for them to discover.
- When they dig in the digging zone, reward them with praise.
- If you catch your dog digging in an unacceptable area, interrupt the behavior with a loud noise and firmly say, "No dig." Then immediately take them to the digging zone.
- Make the unacceptable digging spots unattractive (at least temporarily) by placing rocks or chicken wire over them.

If you've tried all these strategies and still can't solve your dog's digging problem, keep them indoors with you and supervise them during bathroom breaks in the yard. You may also want to consult a behavior professional for additional help.

Adapted from Humane Society of the United States. All rights reserved.

About Napa Humane

The Humane Society of Napa County and SPCA, known as Napa Humane, is a non-profit organization incorporated in 1973. Recognizing that companion animals are an important part of healthy communities, we've grown to consider Napa Humane a community service organization. Our programs and services are designed to address the needs of animals – and also to provide support, education, and assistance for all the people who care for and about them.

Napa Humane is a private and independent organization that is supported by private donations by individuals and businesses, bequests, and fees for service. We receive no government funding, tax dollars or funding from national animal welfare organizations.

Our Mission

To promote the welfare of companion animals through protection, advocacy, education, and by example.