



# DIGGING DOGS



Digging is an instinctual behaviour for dogs. In fact, there are some breeds of dogs that were specifically bred, and thus encouraged, for their ability to dig out game like foxes and badgers. Dachshunds and Terriers are a good example, and they typically display a stronger instinct to dig than other breeds. Some dogs will even grow out of the urge to dig once they reach adulthood, but most will have the occasional dig.

Nevertheless, any dog can get into the habit of digging and it's probably one of those behaviours that you'd rather your dog go without. Like many unwanted behaviours that you'd like to train your dog not to do, it can be very helpful to first understand the reasoning behind the behaviours.

There are many reasons why a dog will dig :-

Dogs will dig in order to escape. There may just be a lot more interesting things on the other side of the fence than there are on your dog's side of the fence, or your dog may be left outside and alone too much and may be trying to get to you.

A dog left outside and alone too often or too long may dig through simple boredom. In this case, you need to deal with his boredom by providing him with toys, taking him for walks or playing with him (refer to Good Games Bad Games handout).

Dogs that have not been de-sexed may be attempting to escape in order to mate. Consider having your dog de-sexed, and making sure the fence has been made dig-proof.

Lots of dogs will dig themselves a shallow hole in warmer weather and then lie in it because the deeper layers of soil are usually cooler and more appealing. In this case, make sure that your dog has relief from the heat, either by bringing him inside or ensuring that he has a cool, shady spot and plenty of water.

Dogs, particularly females, may also dig in order to create a den, while other dogs will dig to uncover a bone or other treat they've previously buried.

If you fertilize your garden with bone or blood meal, it's very likely that your dog has picked up on the scent and is digging in an attempt to find an imagined bone.

Some solutions you can try are :-

- ✚ Retrain your dog to dig in another, approved of area. A child's plastic shell-shaped sandpit makes an ideal digging pit, or an area that has already been dug up and can be left that way will also work. Bury a

favourite treat then show your dog the area and say the command 'dig', praising him when he digs up and finds the treat. This will need to be repeated until your dog learns what to do, and be sure that if you catch him digging elsewhere you correct him. When correcting him, say "uh-uh" in a short, firm voice, bring him to the approved of area and give the 'dig' command. Be sure to praise him well when he digs there instead.

- ✚ Use a different fertiliser to blood and bone.
- ✚ Try spreading pepper, citronella oil or commercial products like "Scram" and "Get off my Garden" (comes in Spray and Granules) to areas. Bear in mind these will wash off if it should rain or watered.
- ✚ Burying his faeces in the hole and covering it with dirt will discourage him from re-digging there again.
- ✚ Fill a balloon with water, put it in the hole and cover with dirt. The dog will get a wet surprise when he tries digging there again.

**Never, ever** punish your dog if you come home from being away and discover he has dug a hole. Contrary to a popular mistaken belief, he will not understand why he is being punished.

Hence, he will take on a "guilty" look when you approach him. He is simply reacting to your body language and tone of voice when you see the hole. It's not because he knows he has dug a hole (which could have been hours ago and is long gone out of his memory) and is about to be punished, he only knows you are not happy about something. You can only correct his digging when you actually catch him at it, or if you actively train him to go to a certain location in the yard.

