



# How To Solve Digging Problems

Digging is a normal behavior for most dogs, but may occur for a wide variety of reasons, including seeking entertainment, seeking prey, seeking comfort or protection, seeking attention, or seeking escape.

Dogs don't dig out of spite, revenge, or a desire to destroy your yard. And while it may be effective to make the area where the dog digs unappealing, it's likely that he'll just begin digging in other locations or display other unacceptable behavior, such as chewing or barking. A more effective approach is to address the cause of the digging or provide an approved place for your dog to dig.

## Seeking Entertainment

Dogs may dig as a form of self-play when they learn that roots and soil "play back." Your dog may be digging for entertainment if:

- He's left alone in the yard for long periods of time without opportunities for interaction with you
- His environment is relatively barren, without playmates or toys
- He's a puppy or adolescent (under three years old) and doesn't have other outlets for his energy
- He's the type of dog that is bred to dig as part of his "job"
- He's a particularly active type of dog who needs an active job to be happy (like the herding or sporting breeds)
- He's recently seen you "playing" in the dirt, gardening or working in the yard

## Recommendations

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

- Walk your dog regularly—it's good exercise, mentally and physically, for both of you!
- Teach your dog to fetch a ball or Frisbee and practice with him as often as possible.
- Teach your dog a few tricks. Practice these tricks every day for five to ten minutes. Continue to introduce new tricks as your pup masters them!
- Take a training class with your dog and practice daily what you've learned.
- Keep interesting toys in the home/yard to keep your dog busy even when you're not around (such as Kong-type toys filled with treats). Rotating the toys makes them seem new and interesting. If your dog continues to dig, consider not leaving them outdoors unsupervised.
- For dedicated diggers, provide an acceptable digging area. Choose an area of the yard where it's okay for your dog to dig and cover the area with loose soil or sand. You may also choose to use a child's sand box so that your pup can dig without

affecting your yard. If you catch your dog digging in an unacceptable area, interrupt the behavior and take the dog to his designated digging area. When he digs in the approved spot, reward him with praise. Make the unacceptable digging spots unattractive (at least temporarily) by setting rocks or chicken wire into the dirt.

### Seeking Prey

Dogs may try to pursue burrowing animals or insects that live in your yard. Your dog may be pursuing prey if the digging is in a very specific area (usually not at the boundaries of the yard), the digging is at the roots of trees or shrubs, or the digging is in a “path” layout. **Recommendations:** Search for possible signs of pests and then rid your yard of them. Avoid methods that could be toxic or dangerous to your pets.

### Seeking Comfort or Protection

In hot weather, dogs may dig holes in order to lie in the cool dirt. They may also dig to provide themselves with shelter from cold, wind or rain, or to try to find water. Your dog may be digging for protection or comfort if the holes are near foundations of buildings, large shade trees or a water source, your dog doesn't have a shelter or his shelter is exposed to the hot sun or cold winds, and/or you find evidence that your dog is lying in the holes he digs.

**Recommendations:** Provide your dog with other sources for the comfort or protection he seeks.

- Provide an insulated doghouse. Make sure it affords protection from wind and sun.
- Your dog may still prefer a hole in the ground, in which case you can try the “approved digging area” recommendation described above. Make sure the allowed digging area is in a protected spot.
- Provide plenty of fresh water in a bowl that can't be tipped over.
- Consider keeping your pup indoors if he is mostly living outside.

### Seeking Attention

Any behavior can become attention-seeking behavior if dogs learn that they receive attention for engaging in it (even punishment is a form of attention). Your dog may be digging to get attention if he digs in your presence, or his other opportunities for interaction with you are limited.

**Recommendations:** We recommend that you ignore the behavior.

- Don't give your dog attention for digging (remember, even punishment is attention).
- Make sure your dog has sufficient time with you on a daily basis, so he doesn't have to resort to misbehaving to get your attention.

## Seeking Escape

Dogs may escape to get to something, to get somewhere, or to get away from something. Your dog may be digging to escape if he digs along the fence line or he digs under the fence.

***Recommendations:*** Do the following in order to keep your dog in the yard.

- Bury chicken wire at the base of the fence (sharp edges rolled under)
- Place large rocks, partially buried, along the bottom of the fence line
- Bury the bottom of the fence one to two feet under the ground
- Do not keep your dog in the yard unattended

### **Regardless of the reason for digging, we don't recommend:**

Punishment after the fact. Not only does this not address the cause of the behavior, but any digging that's motivated by fear or anxiety will be made worse. Punishment may also cause anxiety in dogs that aren't currently fearful.

Staking a dog out near a hole he's dug or filling the hole with water. These techniques don't address the cause of the behavior and will not prevent future digging.