



# DIGGING HOLES

Digging is a fairly common behaviour for dogs because there are so many reasons why dogs do it. Some of the more common reasons are:

- To bury (hide) food e.g bones.
- To have a comfortable or cool place to lie: (predominant in Alaskan Malamutes)
- To mimic (copy) the owner's digging in the garden.
- To escape from the backyard.
- To relieve anxiety or boredom.
- To burn up excess energy.
- Breed specific ie. terrier breed dogs.

## IDENTIFY THE CAUSE

To help identify the cause you must look at where he is digging. Is it near the fence (escape)? It is always in the garden bed (mimic) or does he lie in the holes (comfort).

If there are many holes in the backyard all over the place, then your dog is probably bored or is not getting enough exercise.

The other reason for chronic digging may be due to anxiety. This is a more complex situation and a tailored behaviour modification program would be better suited to help cure this.

## CURING THE PROBLEM

Don't give the dog bones etc that he can't eat completely. He then won't have anything to bury. Give him lamb shanks or lamb necks which can be fully eaten instead of marrow bones which are hard and cannot be fully eaten.

Give him a comfortable and pleasant place to sleep. Ie. raised bed (trampoline style), or doggy bean bag (ideal for indoors or undercover).

Don't do the gardening in front of him or he will learn that gardening is fun.

If your dog is trying to escape, is bored or just burning up energy (having fun) then he is telling you he needs more attention and/or exercise than you are currently providing.

## DIGGING HOLES CONTINUED

All dogs **need** regular (daily) exercise outside their own yard. You will be amazed what an off lead run in the park combined with some obedience training each day will achieve.

In addition to a run in the park and obedience, try to involve your dog more in your lifestyle. Take him out in the car with you and/or have him inside for a few hours each night.

Virtually every dog expert agrees that the best exercise is training, as it is physically and mentally stimulating for your dog. We have found that most dogs that are trained regularly have few, if any, behavioural problems.

Prevention is always better than cure.

## TREATING SYMPTOMS

If you can't find or solve the cause, here are some tips on treating the symptoms.

- Fill the holes with water
- Put the dog's droppings (faeces) in the holes.
- Try sprinkling Cayene pepper around the area (this must be done regularly as the pepper tends to fly away with the wind)
- Confine him in area where he cannot dig e.g. in a pen with a concrete floor. Bad habits, over time, will be broken when they are unable to be exhibited.
- Provide him with his own designated "digging" area. This can be either a sandpit or a section of yard specifically for him. Hide some toys, treats etc in this area only to encourage him to "treasure hunt" in his own section. Don't forget to replenish the digging area daily to encourage him to dig there only.

If you are lucky, merely breaking the habit will sometimes solve the problem permanently (but don't count on it). Most young puppies tend to grow out of digging but again, don't count on it.

If you catch him in the act, you can distract him with a loud noise and then tell him "No".

**Note:** There is no purpose correcting him unless you **catch him in the act**. Punishment after the fact is not only totally useless but is also cruel to your dog.