

## **Why Dogs Dig**

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Does your backyard look like a mine field? Does your dog dig holes big enough to put in an Olympic swimming pool? Digging behavior problems are common complaints by dog owners.

Many dogs are prone to dig from time to time. If you live on lots of property, the digging may not be a problem for you. If you live in the city and your garden is your life, doggie fox holes may be disastrous. There are some things that can be done to help with the problem, but as with most behavior problems, there can be numerous causes and you have to understand the cause before you can hope to solve the problem.

One of the most common causes for digging is in attempts to escape from the yard. Dogs may be motivated to escape because of fears, like thunderstorms, wind or other animals they are not getting along with, because of separation anxiety or because they are excited by animals or people they see or hear outside the yard. Such escape digging occurs near fences, gates or doors and is often accompanied by chewing or clawing at the fences or doors.

Fear and separation anxiety problems should be addressed with desensitization to remove the fears. Excitement escapes can be addressed by trying to reduce the dog's excitement by blocking what she sees or hears, by behavior modification to reduce the excitement and/or making the digging unpleasant or impossible.

Some northern breeds of dogs like huskies and Malamutes may dig pits in the summertime to lay in to keep cool. Giving the dog a cool place to lay in the shade may help or giving the dog a special place to dig may help.

Other dogs dig because they think they hear or smell something in the ground like a buried bone or bugs crawling underground. Such dogs often leave many holes dug in random places in the yard. Giving these dogs a special digging pit that is specially set aside for the dog to dig in may help to channel their habit in less destructive ways. Set aside a small area with soft dirt or sand and bait it with treats or objects that are half-buried. This may encourage digging in an acceptable place.

Try to discourage digging in other places in the yard by blocking them off, filling in holes and covering them with wood or other surfaces that make digging difficult or unpleasant. Sometimes, owners may need to keep the dog out of some sections of yard that they don't want destroyed by fencing it off.

Alternatively, they may simply keep the dog out of the yard unless they are supervised to keep digging from occurring. Recognizing that digging is a common doggie trait may help you to cope with the occasional destruction that can occur.