



Digging is actually a very natural behavior for a dog, but it can be a nuisance for you and your yard! There are many reasons why a dog might be digging but the main reason tends to be boredom. First you will want to determine the most likely reason your dog is digging. Then you can start to solve the problem. Remember that it is important to address the underlying cause of the behavior in order to make your dog more content. Be patient!

Boredom

- **Causes:** One major reason some dogs dig is due to boredom. Dogs are very intelligent and most of them have a lot of energy to burn. When you combine these two elements and don't create an adequate outlet for your dog, they can turn to digging. Also if your dog is a terrier or another type of dog that was bred to dig, this behavior will come naturally since they think of it as their "job".
- **Solutions:** Exercise, exercise and more exercise! There are two forms of exercise, mental and physical, and all dogs need a combination of both. Your dog will need a structured form of exercise, or a "job". This does not include being allowed in the backyard alone to entertain themselves. Here are examples of structured forms of exercise:
 - Make exercise a daily routine: mental, physical, or both
 - Take your dog on daily walks or swims. Or play games of fetch or tug multiple times a week
 - Doggie Daycares and Dog Parks allow your dog to run and play with other dogs for excellent structured exercise
 - Training is a great form of mental exercise; teach your dog new commands and practice everyday
 - Give your dog puzzle toys to stimulate their mind (e.g. kong, kong wobbler, busy buddy) and rotate them
 - For a dedicated digger: You can provide an acceptable digging area such as a sandbox. You can hide toys and treats in the sandbox to make it more interesting. If you catch your dog digging in the dirt interrupt their behavior with a verbal correction and bring them to the sandbox. When they dig in the sandbox make sure to praise them! You can also make the dirt digging spots undesirable by burring chicken wire under the ground.

Attention Seeking

- **Causes:** Some dogs will dig in order to get their owner's attention. You know your dog is probably doing this if they dig in your presence or because they have limited interaction with you during the day. Other reasons for attention seeking include: being left alone for long periods during the day, not having adequate outlets for their energy, or breeds who need a job to stimulate their minds.

- **Solutions:** Increase your dog's quality interaction with people and give your dog adequate outlets for his energy.
 - Walk your dog daily- this is a very good form of structured exercise
 - Training- teach your dog new commands to keep their mind stimulated or take him to a training class
 - Teach your dog to play fetch or tug- another structured form of exercise and quality interaction with you
 - Scheduled play- set aside specific times of the day to play and interact with your dog
 - Puzzle toys- give your dog puzzle toys to stimulate their mind (kong, kong wobbler) and rotate them often
 - Supervision- keep your dog inside if you can't supervise him outside or take him to doggie daycare

Seeking Prey

- **Causes:** Most dogs have a prey drive and enjoy seeking out prey such as small wild animals. Some small animals and insects burrow under the ground which would cause a dog with a high prey drive to dig in order to reach them. Typically a dog that is digging to seek prey will dig in specific areas, usually not at the boundaries of the yard, but at the roots of trees and shrubs, or in a path.
- **Solutions:** Search your yard for possible small animals and insects that your dog could be digging after and determine ways to keep them out and keep your dog away from them.
 - Explore humane ways to keep these animals out of your yard that are not harmful or toxic to your dog.
 - Supervise your dog in the yard at all times until these animals or insects are gone.
 - Teach your dog the 'leave it' command in which they will leave the prey alone.
 - Increase the amount of exercise your dog gets by giving them a job that will satisfy their prey drive. Try some scentwork which will teach your dog to use their nose to find items you ask them to find.

Escaping

- **Causes:** A dog may dig in order to escape the yard because there is something of interest on the other side. Some examples of what they would escape to find might be other dogs (especially females in heat) in the neighborhood, children or people that they like to visit in the neighborhood, prey that is outside of the yard, or freedom to run, explore, & exercise. Dogs that dig to escape typically dig along the fence line or under the fence.
- **Solutions:** Exercise, exercise and more exercise! There are two forms of exercise, mental and physical, and all dogs need a little combination of both. Your dog will need a structured form of exercise or a "job", which does not include being allowed to be in the backyard alone to entertain themselves. Here are a couple examples of structured forms of exercise:
 - Make exercise a daily routine: mental, physical, or both
 - Take your dog on daily walks or swims. Or play games of fetch or tug multiple times a week
 - Doggie Daycares and Dog Parks allow your dog to run and play with dogs for great structured exercise
 - Training is a great form of mental exercise; teach your dog new commands and practice everyday
 - Give your dog puzzle toys to stimulate their mind (e.g. kong, kong wobbler, busy buddy) and rotate them often
 - Determine what your dog is escaping to and satisfy this need (i.e. set up doggie play dates with the neighbors dog he is escaping to find)
 - Supervision- keep your dog inside if you can't supervise him outside or take them to doggie daycare.
 - For a dedicated escaper: You can make the digging spots undesirable by burring chicken wire under the ground, laying chain link fencing anchored to the ground or bury your fence further below the ground. If you catch your dog digging in the dirt interrupt their behavior with a verbal correction and redirected them to some other form of mental stimulation.

Comfort or Protection

- **Causes:** Some dogs will dig in order to have a cool place to lay or to find water in hot weather. Others dogs dig in order to find a place to get out of the elements such as the rain, wind or cold. Dogs that dig for this reason usually dig holes near building foundations, trees, or a water source, and the holes tend to be shallower. These dogs might not have an adequate shelter and they tend to lie in the holes that they dig.
- **Solutions:** If your dog is digging for comfort you will need to find better ways to provide your dog with more protection when he is outside.
 - Provide your dog with an insulated dog house to keep him out of the sun, rain, and cold.

- Try a “cool bed” that is made of materials that tend not to hold heat.
- Make sure your dog has fresh water outside in a bowl that cannot be tipped over.

Maintenance

- **Be Patient:** Remember digging is a natural behavior for some dog and it is unreasonable to expect them never to dig. Depending on the cause the time needed to solve your digging issues can take a while. Be patient! If your dog’s digging is disturbing neighbors remember to talk to them and tell them that you are working on solving the issue and find compromise.
- **Precautions:**
 - **Punishment:** Bringing your dog to the hole that they have dug and punishing them after the fact is not effective. Dogs only equate punishment with what is happening at the time. They will not understand that the act of digging is being punished if it is after the fact. This type of punishment also does not address the underlying cause of the digging behavior. Your dog will likely continue to dig or redirect his negative behavior elsewhere.
 - **Filling the hole:** Filling the hole with water or feces will most likely not deter your dog from digging in the hole and will leave you with a very messy dog. As mentioned above this technique does not address the underlying cause of the digging behavior. Your dog will likely continue to dig or redirect his negative behavior elsewhere.

If you are having any issues with digging, please contact our training facility,
New Dawn Animal Behavior Center, at: www.NewDawnABC.com or call 727-415-1567

New Dawn

Animal Behavior Center

SPCA TAMPA BAY