

Digity Diggin' Dog

Q What can I do about my dog's determination to dig in the backyard. It looks like a gopher invasion with all the holes! He also digs before circling in his doggy bed, causing rips to the cover. Help!

● Arden Moore ● Steve Brooks

MANY DOGS LOVE TO WORK THEIR FRONT PAWS AS THEY DIG, DIG, DIG with great delight in dirt, sand and yes, your well-manicured lawn or flower garden. Credit – or blame – genetics in some part. Your dog's wolf ancestors and other canids dug to create dens for their pups or to hide food.

Modern-day dogs dig to bury bones or toys, to burn off pent-up energy, to banish boredom or to carve out a cool turf to chill out during hot weather. The main reason your dog circles and paws his indoor bed is to make it a comfy spot that sports his scent – his way of communicating to other pets that this belongs to him.

It's time to make a deal with your gotta-dig dog. Create a dog-designated digging section in your yard that to your dog, is far more beckoning than your flower bed or grassy lawn. Give your dog his own turf to tear up. Take a plastic kiddie pool, fill it with soft dirt and hide a few dog treats for him to sniff out and enjoy. Think of it as a canine treasure hunt. Be sure to heap on the praise each time your dog digs in his designated place.

At the same time, make the rest of the yard less dig-welcoming. Drop some of your dog's poop in those holes and cover them with dirt. Sprinkle or spray the area with red pepper flakes or citronella to make the area less appealing. And, fence in your garden areas with chicken wire.

Remember, some dogs dig out of boredom, so be sure to give your dog opportunities for regular vigorous walks or runs. Step up games of fetch to give your dog a real workout. And re-channel his attention by giving him a Kong stuffed with peanut butter or cheese to occupy his time.

Relieving his boredom and wearing him out physically and mentally will go a long way toward discouraging his desire to dig up your garden or yard. Good luck! 🐾

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DIGGING IS AN EXPLORATORY BEHAVIOR AND INSTINCT PLAYS A ROLE. Dogs in the wild dig to build a den to protect their puppies. Terriers (earth-dog) and dachshunds were bred to dig and hunt for prey.

Try to figure out why they are digging: attention, bored, anxious, fearful, lacking mental or physical stimulation, trying to escape under a fence, or to stay cool in summer or warm in winter? I think most dogs dig because it's fun!

Digging is self-rewarding; the more a dog practices, the worse it can get.

Whether your dog is burying a bone in the backyard, or circling their bed, they're just trying to create a comfortable place to lay and claim a safe spot. You should see how much tossing and turning I do in my bed to get comfortable!

When my dogs are in the yard, I'm the playground monitor so I can spot digging at the start. I call "come," reward them for coming, then redirect to another activity. If they don't come, that means training is necessary. Once I have a better recall (usually) that's all it takes.

The best deterrent for digging is to place garden rocks or bury bricks where you don't want them to dig. Once they hit the hard surface, they usually stop. You can also bury your dog's poop (they don't like to dig there.)

DIGITY DIGGIN' TIPS:

- Create a digging pit (or sandbox) and let your dog dig to China! Encourage digging in that spot only.
- Teach a foolproof "come". If you catch your dog digging elsewhere, call "come" in a happy, non-threatening voice. Praise your pup and redirect back to the digging pit or to a behavior incompatible with digging (retrieve game, interactive toys, etc.).
- Become more exiting to your dog than a gopher!
- Make sure your dog's physical, mental and emotional needs are being met at home.
- Management, supervision and exercise are key!

For dog beds, keep nails trimmed and use a cover. I let my dog dig in his bed to get comfy, but if he continues to interrupt my TV show, I calmly say "lay down" and offer a chew toy.

What's the upside of digity dogs? Digging keeps nails short and will tire your pup out! 🐾

STEVE BROOKS (CPDT-KA), Certified Professional Dog Trainer (CPDT/KA), Canine Behavioral Expert and author of *DOG BITES* with STEVE BROOKS, shares 20 years of training techniques using "dog bites" as rewards for good behavior. SteveBrooksK9U.com