

Digging

The Motivation

Digging has a number of causes and motivating factors. Dogs dig to keep warm or cool when outside for extended periods, to hunt insects and other small animals, to hide items, or sometimes to escape. Regardless of the cause, digging is self-reinforcing behavior. Some breeds in the terrier and hound families are predisposed to dig due to selective breeding for successful diggers and chasers of underground vermin. For those bred to dig, it is important to provide proper outlets to express their species specific behavior.

Prevention & Management

If your dog shows a propensity to dig in specific areas, do not allow unsupervised access to those areas. While digging is an enjoyable activity for many dogs, it can also be due to a lack of stimulation and boredom. Try adding an extra walk or an additional play session to your dog's schedule to burn energy and enrich their lives. Training sessions can also be a valuable way to help tire your dog's brain. If you need other ideas for activities to add to your dog's day, check out our enrichment handout!

You can also provide an appropriate digging area for your dog, so he is still able to fulfill the desire to dig. The area can be as simple as a child's sandbox. To help your dog find the sandbox more rewarding than other digging areas, you can try hiding treats or toys in the sand for your dog to find.

Problem Solving

Ignoring digging is not a suitable method to reduce the behavior because digging is self-reinforcing. We must substitute the area in which your dog is digging or find an alternative outlet for mental and physical stimulation.

1. If you catch your dog digging, use an excited, upbeat tone to call your dog's attention away from digging.
2. Redirect your dog to their appropriate digging place by calling him over and leading him to the desired area.
3. If you do not have a designated area for digging, call your dog's attention and play a game of fetch, tug, or chase.
4. You can also engage in a training session once your dog is called off their digging spot. By asking your dog for alternative behaviors, you are rewarding behaviors that are incompatible with digging, i.e. your dog cannot come over to you and dig at the same time.



Animal Matters Training & Swim

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Important Notes

The self reinforcing nature of digging makes it important to be proactive with managing your dog's access to digging areas. If you see your dog getting ready to dig, call them over or redirect their attention for a more appropriate behavior. Positive punishment such as verbal or physical reprimands will only teach your dog to dig when you are not around. They will learn to dig when unattended or in sports you cannot see to avoid punishment. Remember, you are teaching your dog where you would like them to dig or what you would like them to do instead of dig. If you notice patterns of your dog digging excessively when left alone or when in a panicked state, consult a certified, professional behaviorist to explore potential stress or anxiety related causes.



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