



# Digging!

Before considering a course of action, we need to first establish **why** your dog is digging. Strategies will vary in suitability depending on this fact.

## **Burying Bones – excellent cold storage.**

Dogs will bury their bones where there is a surplus food supply, instinctively storing the surplus for leaner times.

Raw, meaty bones are an excellent source of minerals and calcium and also aid in dental care for your dog.



If bones are being given to the dog as an extra to the daily food intake or as an occasional treat, they may be surplus to your dog's requirements. When including bones in your dog's diet, ensure the bone is the actual meal for that occasion. You may need to reduce the dog's general food intake.

If bone burying is still occurring restrain the dog to one location for bone eating. Any leftover bone can be disposed of later. Alternatively, tie the bone with chain so that it is hanging off the ground at just below the dog's nose level. Eating this bone will be more challenging and provide additional stimulation.

## **A Balanced Diet**

Dogs are natural herbalists - if there is a lacking in their dietary requirements they can be quiet adept at selecting the missing components from your garden – even when they are located underground.

If your dog is fed a good quality balanced dog food, this should not be necessary. A consultation with your veterinarian may disclose another reason for this habit.

## Shelter



Many dogs will dig out a resting area, seeking either warmth or coolness from the soil.



We can discourage the dog from digging in the spot he has chosen by applying one of numerous methods, including: placing his own droppings in the area; laying chicken wire over the ground; placing some large rocks or bricks in the area; concreting or paving the spot; or the use of scent aversion (vinegar, cayenne pepper, alcohol are good or try a commercial preparation such as "Get-Off").

However, if you do not supply the dog with an alternative suitable protected resting place, he will simply relocate.

## Anxiety

Often digging starts as a puppy developmental behaviour. However, our untimely reactions to excavations or other destruction, on our arrival home can create anxiety.

You must catch the dog in the act if you are going to scold the behaviour. The dog cannot associate your displeasure with a hole in the ground several minutes after he has dug it, let alone hours later. Instead, your dog will simply learn that some days when you return home, you will be unpredictably aggressive.

He may display submissive behaviours in anticipation of the possibility of you displaying anger - we often misinterpret these behaviours as guilt on the dog's part. The dog may even start displaying these behaviours before you've even shown any anger - he is anticipating your possible aggression and is

attempting to pre-empt it. Now we start to suspect what the dog may have done to display such "guilt". WRONG! WRONG! WRONG! Poor, poor dog! When you leave the house, he has to wait and worry all that time wondering if you will return in a loving mood or an aggressive mood - now that is definitely something to feel anxious about!



You will need to rebuild your dog's confidence in you by removing all aggression or intimidating tactics in your behaviour. Greet the dog happily on your arrival home; perhaps having the dog perform some simple exercises to receive food treats, toys or simply your attention as a reward.

To minimise damage, you might also like to consider leaving the dog in a confined area with chew toys, when you have to go out, until he is able to cope.

Combine confidence building, with some of the suggestions following for managing digging for fun, for your greatest chance of success. If your dog still appears to be suffering from anxiety, seek the assistance of a qualified professional.



### **The Escape Artist**

A layer of cement or heavy gauge wire under the soil at the base of the fence line will render this escape route blocked!

There is no magic answer to stop your dog from attempting to escape, other than ensuring that escape attempts are never successful - your yard simply must be dog proof. Once the dog has experienced the delights of the world outside his yard, keeping him in will become increasingly difficult. You will have to be creative with fencing and barriers!



Ensure the dog is given off-territory stimulation (minimum 40 minutes walk) every day to reduce the need to escape.

Consider the possibility that the dog maybe suffering from anxiety or; that something in the environment could be creating fear. Professional help maybe required.

### **Just for the Fun of it!**

Most adolescent dogs will go through a developmental digging phase - many will outgrow the behaviour, but some will take it into adulthood as an enjoyable and stimulating activity. Attempting to stop the behaviour entirely will often result in frustration for both dog and owner. Instead, let's consider a

compromise: give the dog a "legal" digging site - somewhere that is not an eyesore or a trip-hazard to you. Encourage the dog to dig in this location by burying several pieces of bone there, while he is watching. You may have discovered already that anywhere you dig creates an interest for the dog to dig there later. The bones would need to be the dog's meal for that day.

After a couple of repetitions, bury the bones when the dog is not watching - he will return to the site to double check if he may have missed anything previously and... Hey Presto!... more buried treasure has grown in this magical dig site. The dog will be drawn to dig in this particular area. With experience the bones can be buried deeper, the soil compacted harder and rocks and bricks added to increase the challenge and stimulation value for the dog.

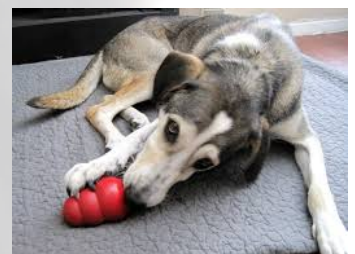
**Rancid meat and bones can pose a serious health risk to us and our children. Consider using commercial dog treats and/or toys to reduce the risk.**

Use scent deterrents in areas where you do not want the dog to dig. Possibilities include the dog's own droppings, cayenne pepper, garlic, or the commercial preparations such as "Get Off" - consider anything that your individual dog will find offensive. An important key to success with scent aversions is that you must re-apply the offensive scent daily so that the dog develops an association that the particular area or article always smells offensive.

### **Provide Alternative Forms of Stimulation**



Feeding a dog his meal in a bowl is a wasted opportunity to provide stimulation. Throw away the food bowl! The dog will now have to work for his daily food rations. His food will be stuffed into dog toys made for the purpose or hidden in dog puzzles or scattered over the lawn or pavers for him to seek out.



The more time and energy the dog spends eating or finding food sources, the less time and energy for activities such as digging and destruction of our belongings.

We have outlined only some of the many possible causes and remedies for digging. If the answer to your problem has not been outlined, please do not hesitate to contact us to discuss the problem further.

