



# STOP DIGGING IN ITS TRACKS

First figure out why your dog digs. Each reason requires a different remedy.

<b>If Your Dog Does This</b>	<b>Try This</b>
Suddenly started digging in a shady spot in warm weather.	Your dog likely is hot. Consider giving up a shady outdoor spot to the digger and adding a doggie door to let your dog indoors more often. You also can run a fan outdoors, buy a canine water bed or provide a kiddie pool.
Seems hyperactive, chews destructively, digs holes.	Your dog may be bored. Take it out of the yard for exercise for at least one hour a day. Play fetch, set up play dates with neighbor dogs, toss a Frisbee, take obedience or agility classes together. Don't restrict your dog to living in the yard. The more it is left alone, the more likely it is to dig out of boredom. Play together and leave toys out for your dog to play with when alone.
Digs in the middle of the yard.	Check for burrowing rodents. Dogs will dig to get at them. If you find a burrow, consider hiring a humane trapper familiar with laws protecting wild animals.
Digs at the fence line to get out of the yard.	Your dog may be bored and trying to get at something on the other side of the fence. Consider whether the dog's social needs are being met. Neutering or spaying with curb some digging tendencies. Fill in gaps below the fence with concrete or attach chicken wire to the bottom of the fence and curve into the ground, burying it below the grass.
Digs up new bushes.	The dog may be attracted to the smell of the fresh dirt. Protect new plants with wire and fencing. Once plants are mature, dogs tend to lose interest.
Dog is pregnant.	Dogs dig to create dens in which to give birth. Be patient and wait until after pups are born to see if the behavior disappears on its own.
Digs despite all of your attempts to stop it.	Consider setting aside a part of the yard where you can bury bones and favorite toys for your dog. Cover an emerging lawn with chicken wire to make it difficult for dogs to dig it up.

For dogs, digging is in the genes. Wild ancestors dug to hide their food and created dens to rear pups. Humans helped nature along by selecting for the trait in breeds used to dig up vermin and other prey from earthen tunnels. Terriers, the most popular group for this job, even take their name from the Latin word for earth—*terra*. Scottish Terriers and West Highland Terriers, in particular, were bred to be

efficient digging machines. Their turned-out feet let them shovel dirt to the side—an improvement over Fox Terriers and other straight-legged Terriers that eventually fell into a hole as dirt piled up behind them. “If you’ve been dealing with dogs that have been bred to dig, it’s very difficult to stop digging”, said Stanley Coren, author of *The Intelligence of Dogs and Why We Love The Dogs We Do* and psychology professor at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver.

Look for a reason for the digging by studying when and where your dog digs. The most important part is to address the cause.

**Many dogs seem to be attracted to the fresh scent of tilled earth.** They lose interest in mature plants in old soil. Waiting a few days after gardening to return dogs to the yard helps. Setting up wire or plastic-fence barriers around new plants and laying chicken wire or heavier-grade stockade fencing over a newly seeded lawn can discourage dogs interested in the soft, loose dirt of recently tilled areas.

**Some dogs dig by example.** “Monkey see, monkey do”. Your dog sees you digging while gardening and copies the behavior. Prevent the wrong message from being sent by keeping your dog away when doing yard work.

**Dogs also may dig for territorial reasons.** When the owners of a dog named Baron tired of his fence-line digging, they planted a row of rose bushes. Baron responded by digging up a rose bush each day. His owners replanted the bushes. Baron re-dug them. Finally his owner gave up. Baron didn’t want anything along his fence and his owners always referred to it as the “War of the Roses”.

**When you think you know why your dog digs, you can explore solutions.** You can slow down your digger by trimming their nails. With long nails, it’s easy to dig. All manner creative products combat diggers, including a motion-activated scarecrow that makes a thumping sound and sprays water when a dog approaches an off-limits area. If a fence alone isn’t enough to keep a dog out, an electric fencing system sprays citronella at the approaching dog. A variation: a citronella collar operated by remote control. When you see the dog start to dig, you immediately set off the citrus-like spray. Of course, you can try a low-tech version, too—put pennies in a pop can and toss the can in its directions to startle it. You are NOT trying to hit the dog with the can!

**A common reason dogs dig is simply out of boredom.** Many owners let their dog out in the yard and think it’s sufficient exercise. Ideally, a dog should be taken out of the yard for more rigorous exercise for an hour a day. If improving your dog’s social calendar doesn’t stop digging, turn to a professional...someone who deals with a lot of these cases—such as a qualified animal behaviorist. Forget quick fixes such as medication. While rare cases of separation anxiety may warrant anti-depressants, digging almost always is a totally different issue, experts say.

## **10 Common Traits of Diggers**

Dogs are more likely to dig if they:

1. Are exercised too little.
2. Sleep outside at night.
3. Are alone too much.
4. Haven't been neutered or spayed.
5. Are less than 2 years of age.
6. Are a breed known for digging (terriers, Dachshunds, Alaskan Malamutes and Siberian Huskies, to name a few).
7. Have little or no obedience training.
8. Are not provided with adequate shade and over-exposed to the sun.
9. Have a very high nervous system activity level.
10. Are punished after the fact (the dog can't make the connection between punishment and the act of digging).