

# Dog digging my yard... Ask a Trainer

By Nan Arthur, CDBC, CPDT, KPA CTP

Dear Trainer,

Help, my dog is destroying my back yard. We recently put in a new garden and grass and it now looks like a wartime landscape. We thought since our dog is now about a year old she wouldn't be so destructive, but I guess we were wrong. My husband is starting to talk about getting rid of our dog, but I really love her, so I don't want it to come to that. My dog is a Jack Russell Terrier, by the way, and she digs holes big enough that her whole body is in them, and when she comes up, she is covered with dirt. I also worry that she is going to dig right under the fence and get out.

Signed,

*Living with a dirt devil*

Dear Dirt,

Oh the love of terriers! I can picture your dog having the time of her life excavating your yard and being covered in dirt when she is done. It's really a typical picture of an "Earth Dog," which are what Jack Russell Terriers are. The American Kennel Club even offers "Earth Dog" performance events, and you can find out more at <http://www.akc.org/events/earthdog/index.cfm>.

The point being, dogs that are bred to do a particular job will most likely do their job when given the opportunity, so rather than re-homing your dog, lets look at ways to channel all of that energy to something more appropriate.

To help you and other readers understand why your dog is digging, a quick look at the history of the Jack Russell Terrier is warranted. Jack Russell Terriers were developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and bred to hunt small game; mostly fox. It was their job to dig into the dens and flush them out. Considering that, it's easy to see where your dog's "need to dig," comes from.

However, digging is not limited to "Earth Dogs," so I will also address other issues with digging as well.

## Reasons for digging

- Many dogs dig to cool off, getting deep into the moist soil to bring down their temperature. If this is the case, providing a baby pool with water can help, or consider leaving the dog inside where it is cooler when you can't supervise.
- Dogs also dig to catch varmints in the yard or dig up grubs in the grass, so a good solution would be to work to remove varmints and keep your grass healthy so the grubs don't want to live there.
- Some dogs watch us dig in our gardens and they like to join in. These dogs can be provided with other things to do, such as chewing on a bone, or redirecting them to play ball.

- ❑ Unneutered male dogs may dig to get out of a yard when a female is in season. Neutering the dog will quickly take care of that.
- ❑ Many dogs stave off boredom with digging (probably the number one reason). It's important to help these dogs and direct that boredom into appropriate avenues. So, for dogs that enjoy digging for the sake of digging, think about adopting a "if you can't beat them, join them," attitude. In other words, provide your dog with interesting things that will satisfy her need to dig.

### **Things that can help**

More exercise or more interesting exercise. Change your daily routine. Dogs love to explore new places and sniff new things. There is a treasure of benefit in taking dogs to new places to explore and exercise. This will provide more mental stimulation as well as physical exercise.

Give your dog permission to be messy! Let your dog have things that she can shred and dig such as a fast food restaurant hamburger in the bag so she has to rip and tear it open to get the hamburger that is still wrapped in the paper.

Add something new to your dog's environment each day to provoke thought and interaction with new stimulus. Things that might be interesting to dogs: Cardboard boxes with toys and treats in them, old socks that are tied in knots and stuffed with treats, the core of toilet paper or paper towels with a little paper left on them, oatmeal boxes with holes punched in them with treats and toys inside and the top put back on, or an empty plastic bottle with your dog's whole meal in it (throw away the top), to name just a few. Make a stop at your local thrift store or a garage sale for other items. (Supervise all of these, of course!)

Buy your dog a wading pool and fill it with water and then drop Kongs stuffed with small amounts of peanut butter or spray cheese into the water so your dog can go fishing! Or, cut up turkey or chicken dogs and drop them in the water for your dog to fish out.

Provide your dog a digging pit. This is either an area somewhere in the yard, or you can fill a baby pool with dirt and sand then bury toys and treats so your dog can dig for buried treasures. If you give your dog a section of the yard, be sure to mark it so your dog has a clear idea of the boundaries. Rocks around the perimeter, or wooden sides, (like a child's sandbox) will give your dog a clearly defined area where it is okay to dig. The important thing here is to plant toys and food in the area so as your dog digs she will find wonderful things in her designated area. Stuffed Kongs are good for this, but rawhides, bully sticks, squeaky toys, or anything you think your dog would like can be hidden in the digging pit.

There are also many food carrier toys, such as Buster Cubes that can make mealtime more interesting and a good workout for your dog. These types of toys require your dog to push, paw or nose the product to get the food to fall out. You can also just take your dog's dry food and scatter it in the yard so your dog has to search for it.

Any or all of these suggestions provide physical and mental outlets for bored dogs or dogs with the inherent need to dig, and will help to minimize your dog's landscaping.

Good luck,

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