

Digging Dogs

Dogs love to dig. For some, it truly is what they were born to do. Dachshunds and Jack Russells and many of the short-legged terriers were bred to dig up vermin. So naturally, that's what they do—dig. Gophers and moles are wonderful instigators of digging behaviors and definitely a wonderful reward that encourages more digging if the critter is caught. Some dogs are born explorers and want to investigate what's hiding in and around the dirt. Hounds love to search for a scent, and sometimes that means digging around. Some dogs dig to bury bones, others dig to find a cool spot to sleep. Some dogs, well, they just like to dig. Boredom is often a cause of digging. Whatever the reason, many dogs love to dig and many humans don't understand what is so fascinating beneath their precious Nasturtiums.

When people first invite an animal companion into their home, they understand that certain behaviors are going to happen. For instance, they know it is natural for a dog to eliminate every day, and they work to direct this behavior to happen in an acceptable place. They know a puppy likes to chew, and they teach him to chew appropriate things. But, when it comes to digging, people just want the behavior to stop. However, digging is also a behavior that can be redirected so the dog can enjoy the natural instincts of digging, and the human can have a backyard that doesn't look like a battlefield with craters. The following are the steps to create a digging box that meets both the human's need to have a neat backyard and the dog's need to dig.

1. Decide what spot is all right for digging. This spot should be partially or all in the shade which will help keep the box cool and moist. If you have a pristine yard, use wood or stones around the digging area to make the digging spot part of the landscaping.
2. Turn over the dirt in the digging area add some nice smelly mulch and some sand. Be sure the area is large enough for the size dog that will be using it.
3. Bury some of the dog's favorite toys in the box as well as some new ones and some yummy biscuits. Let the dog watch the burying process.
4. Now the fun begins! Give the command "Go Dig" and jump in the box with the dog and start digging around. Yes, you start digging. Get excited and make a big deal about the digging and call the dog over to join in. At first the dog may just watch like you are a little crazy, especially if the dog has been yelled at for the past several months for digging. But eventually the dog won't be able to resist joining in on the fun.
5. Supervise the dog outside for a week or so to avoid any digging outside of the box. Redirect inappropriate digging to the box by saying "Oh, oh," to interrupt the digging (clap your hands if necessary) and then "Go Dig" in a happy voice and lead the dog to the box. Gradually work up to leaving the dog alone for longer periods of time as the dog begins to understand.
6. Keep the digging box interesting by periodically hiding new toys when the dog is not looking and be sure to place those that have been dug up back in the box.

If the dog is digging out of boredom, a digging box may help the problem, but the owner will still need to find other things to keep the dog exercised and entertained. Several daily exercise sessions like a walk or chasing a ball or stick help keep dogs fit both in mind and body. Interactive toys like the Kong or Buster Cube are great toys for when no one is around to play. As with any behavior problem, it is not enough to tell a dog "No;" dog's also need to know what "Yes" is. Always try to redirect inappropriate behavior to an appropriate behavior in order to live with a happy, healthy, well-adjusted canine companion that will be digging your company instead of your Nasturtiums.