

# How to Stop a Dog From Digging in the Yard

*Digging is only a symptom of a real problem that you'll need to address before you can expect a behavioral change.*

By [Clarissa Fallis](#) August 20, 2012

<http://www.petful.com/behaviors/stop-dog-digging-yard/>



*Some breeds are predisposed to digging. By: [eselsmann](#)*

It can be infuriating to look out the window and see your [dog digging](#) up another hole in the yard.

You may yell at him to interrupt the behavior, but most of the time he just ignores you and keeps on digging. This behavior is common and extremely frustrating. As with all behavior problems, we need to understand the underlying cause of the problem. Dogs can dig for a variety of reasons. Some of the common ones are:

- Boredom
- Cooling
- Separation anxiety
- [Hiding bones](#) or toys
- [Breed](#) is predisposed to this problem (genetic)
- Escape
- Hunting

## Stop the Digging

Understand that digging is only a *symptom* of the real problem that needs be addressed before you can expect a behavioral change.

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### If They're Bored

If your dog is digging while you are not at the house, do not reprimand your dog when you come home. Dragging him over the hole made hours ago is not only a waste of time but it can teach your dog to dread your arrival at the house.

Boredom is the most common cause for digging. Most people underestimate the amount of exercise their dogs need. One 20-minute walk a day will suffice most breeds, but some working breeds need two walks a day. The more energy being used in *acceptable* activities, the less they will have to behave destructively.

### **If They're Trying to Keep Cool**

Often dogs dig in the yard because it is [hot outside](#) and they are trying to cool themselves off in the dirt. These dogs usually will not stop digging unless they find a way to cool.

Make sure there is a patio covering, trees or a dog house to provide some shade. I also suggest setting up a little plastic wading pool for the dog to cool himself off in if it becomes too hot. Chilled neck wraps and cooling pads are also available on the market for dogs that easily get too warm.

### **If They're Just Naturally Diggers**

Certain breeds like terriers and [dachshunds](#) are bred to dig for badgers, so they are predisposed to digging. Check out this quick video to watch a couple of dachshunds in action:

These dogs can be very resistant to any measures taken to curb this problem. I suggest creating [a digging pit](#) where the dog is allowed to dig. Make sure you make the rest of the yard unappealing by putting lava rocks or the dog's stool in the holes about an inch above the surface when you are filling them.

To designate a digging pit, line an area of soft ground with rocks or boards and bury things that you know the dog will want to dig up like treats and bones. When you see your dog digging in that area, reward and praise him. You can even take the dog over to the digging pit and start digging a little yourself to show the dog what is an acceptable behavior.

Now that we've dealt with the underlying cause, we can address this behavioral issue through a four-step treatment plan.

### **1. Reinforcement of Alternative Behaviors**

This component of the treatment plan is often overlooked when curbing a digging problem. When you see your dog doing appropriate things in the yard other than digging, don't forget to praise him! If you increase your praise when your dog is chewing on a toy or sunning himself, you increase the chances of your dog doing those behaviors.

### **2. Management and Setting Up for Success**

When your dog isn't looking, fill those holes and place rocks, your dog's stool or a blown-up balloon about an inch or two below the surface. Dogs often dig in the same place more than once, so when he goes back, he will find it unpleasant and will stop or move to a new location. If he starts to dig in a new spot, make sure you fill those holes within two weeks.

It's essential, though, that your dog does not see you filling the holes. He will assume that since you can play in the dirt, that it is an acceptable behavior.

If the dog is digging in one specific area, like a garden, plant chicken wire about an inch from the surface. Make sure you cut a piece big enough to cover the ground around the hole. You can leave the wire in the ground and allow the grass to grow through it. If the dog chooses to dig in that area again, it will be uncomfortable for him to dig where the chicken wire is buried.

As a last-case scenario, have a professional groomer or vet cut your dog's nails short. If the nails are short enough, it will cause discomfort for the dog to dig.

### 3. Consequences

After the cause of the digging is addressed, digging may become a habit for the dog. In this case, you want to interrupt the behavior with a correction. Make sure your dog does not see you giving a correction; you want the dog to connect the correction to the digging, not your presence. Below are a couple ideas for interrupting/correcting this behavior:

- **Shaker Can:** Fill an empty soda can with a few pennies to make a shaker can. When you see the dog digging, cast it out an open window toward the dog (not hitting the dog).
- **Squirt of Water:** Using a high-powered squirt gun can startle your pet and stop the behavior. Again, make sure the dog does not see you doing this.
- **Loud Noise:** Use a pet corrector spray or an air horn to stop the behavior.

#### 4. Consistency

Stay consistent in your treatment plan — this is absolutely the most important component of the plan. Since digging is a self-rewarding behavior and most dogs enjoy it, everyone in the family needs to be consistent with curtailing this behavior.

Seeing your dog digging in the yard can be very annoying; but through consistent effort, it can be stopped.