Sharing Your Garden With Dogs

**NOTE: This article is offered as a writing sample only. The content was written for another client.**

With careful planning that allows plenty of room for your dog’s instinctive and necessary behaviors, you can have a lawn and garden that both you and your dog will enjoy. Common problems include urine spots in the lawn, digging and plant destruction. The solutions to these problems may be easier than you think.

Lawn Spots

When a dog urinates repeatedly in the same spot, the grass develops unsightly, pale yellow spots. The cause is the nitrogen salts in the urine. Sprinkle a handful of gypsum around the affected area to dissolve the accumulated salts. You can also try a mixture of 1/2 cup cola, 1/2 cup beer and 1/2 cup ammonia. Pour the mixture into a 20-gallon hose-end sprayer and spray the spot to the point of run-off.

Training your dog to urinate in a specific part of the yard is the best way to prevent lawn spots. Cover the potty area with an organic mulch different from the one you use in flower beds and rinse it with a hose from time to time to keep down the odor. You can screen off the area with a few shrubs or a trellis with climbing vines. Remove feces promptly and dispose of them. Dog feces may contain human pathogens, so don’t use them in the compost pile.

If you continue to have problems with lawn spots and urine odor, consider giving your dog a dietary supplement containing yucca (Yucca schidigera). The active ingredient in yucca extract neutralizes the ammonia in dog urine. Good pet stores a variety of products containing yucca, including dog biscuits, capsules, and supplements to mix with his food.

Digging

Bone meal is a phosphorous-rich garden fertilizer, but it encourages digging. Instead of bone meal, use other phosphorous sources such as seaweed, fish emulsion or rock phosphate. Well-rotted poultry manure is also a good source of phosphorous, but some dogs are intrigued by the smell.

Most dogs hate the smell of hot peppers. Make your own pepper spray by combining chopped garlic, onion, cayenne peppers and jalepeno peppers in a quart of warm water. Add a tablespoon each of chili powder and hot sauce, and a squirt of liquid dish soap. Let the mixture sit for 24 hours, and then strain it through cheesecloth or pantyhose. Spray or sprinkle the liquid on spots where you don’t want your dog to dig. This mixture is safe to use on lawns or garden beds.

Some dogs dislike banana peels. Place them on the surface of the soil, or bury them just under the surface. Even if your dog isn’t repelled by them, the rotting peels provide your plants with essential potassium as they break down.

Design Tips

Dogs like to patrol the perimeter of the property, making it difficult to get grass to grow along the fence line. Instead of planting grass, construct a pathway filled with mulch. A brick or stone edging will hold the mulch in place.

Dogs are likely to see dense groups of plants as a barrier, so plant flowers and shrubs close together in groups. Use sturdy plants that can take a little abuse around the outer edges of your garden beds, and place more delicate plants further back. Brick, rock or sturdy wooden edgings will clearly define the garden space and make training easier. Consider your dog’s safety when choosing plants. If you aren’t sure which plants are safe, consult the ASPCA website for a long list of non-toxic plants.

You can create an attractive lawn and garden where you will enjoy spending time with your dog. Anticipate the problems that may arise, and work the solutions into your design. When things don’t go as planned, don’t hesitate to make the necessary changes. A little work now can save you a lot of frustration later.