

Why Do Dogs Dig?

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Digging is such a source of joy for so many dogs. Has your dog filled your yard with holes? Does your garden look like gophers had a wild party? Digging is a [common problem behavior](#) in dogs, and many dog owners suffer the consequences at some point. It can be challenging to prevent, and dangerous if your dog is digging under the fence and [escaping the yard](#). Understanding why your dog is digging will help better equip you to handle and live with this instinctive behavior.

Being a Dog

Why do dogs dig? Dogs dig for many reasons, but the core of the behavior goes back to a dog's wolf ancestors. Digging is arguably as much a part of dogdom as [barking](#) or [sniffing](#). In fact, that instinctual tendency is why some breeds were originally used to hunt animals in underground dens.

In the case of certain breeds, human intervention made the digging instinct even stronger. Think about [terriers](#). These dogs are also known as “[earthdogs](#)” because of their incredible commitment to following prey into tunnels in the earth, even if that means digging their way in. Humans purposefully developed these breeds to exhibit this behavior. Therefore, it seems unreasonable to expect it to vanish, just because we don't want to lose our vegetable garden.

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Digging for Many Reasons

It's clear that digging is an instinctive canine behavior. After all, dogs even dig in the couch cushions before lying down for a nap. But what is your dog hoping to accomplish with all that pawing at the ground? The truth is, there are many different reasons why dogs dig. The most basic of these is to seek prey. Yards infested with rodents may have dogs digging intensively to find moles or mice.

There are other practical reasons for digging as well. For example, dogs may dig a shallow bed in the cool earth to help beat the heat on a warm summer's day. Thick-coated Northern breeds like the [Alaskan Malamute](#) or [Siberian Husky](#) may be especially prone to this. Pregnant females may also be inclined to dig as part of their denning instinct.

And just as dogs dig to look for food, they will dig to [bury things](#), too. This caching behavior is a throwback to that wolf heritage. If your dog has had enough of a bone or toy but doesn't want to risk leaving it where it can be “stolen,” they might choose to keep it safe by placing it underground.

Of course, locating it again is another story!

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Dogs also will dig to get under barriers. They might be trying to escape the yard to find more exciting locations or even search for a mate. But keep in mind, not all escape artists are looking for fun. Some dogs will try to escape because they are [anxious](#) in the yard or scared to [be alone](#).

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Finally, dogs dig because it's incredibly entertaining. It's a great relief for [bored dogs](#) with nothing else to occupy their time. It can also be used as anxiety relief because the dog is keeping busy. And of course, for so many dogs, it's just plain fun to excavate holes and pile up dirt.

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Putting a Stop to Digging

It's extremely difficult to stop a dog from being a dog. But, there are ways to minimize digging so your yard and garden don't look like Swiss cheese. First, think about why your dog is digging. An anxious dog needs confidence-building, and a bored dog needs more stimulation. By identifying the cause, you will be more effective at reducing the behavior.

Ensure your dog is getting enough [mental stimulation](#) and [physical exercise](#) every day. This will help with boredom and anxiety, and provide more appropriate types of fun. You can also make the backyard more entertaining by providing [puzzle toys](#) for your dog to play with outside.

Training sessions in the backyard are another way to occupy and exercise your dog. Plus, they have the added benefit of changing your dog's perception of what the backyard is for (i.e., interacting with you), rather than getting into trouble.

Channeling Digging in Appropriate Ways

Despite all your best efforts to redirect your dog, that digging instinct can still kick in. So why not embrace it? If it brings your dog joy, find a way for it to work for you. The easiest way is to give your dog a digging spot. A sandbox can work wonders in this way.

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Bury [rubber bones](#) and other toys in the sand so your dog can find treasures while exploring. This will make the digging spot more rewarding than the rest of the yard. Any time your dog starts to dig somewhere other than the digging spot, gently redirect them and reward any digging in that

preferred place.

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[Dog sports](#) are another way to channel your dog's instincts into something constructive. If you have a [Dachshund](#) or terrier, [AKC Earthdog](#) might be the perfect fit. Your dog will search underground tunnels for caged rats kept safe behind a barrier.

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[AKC Scent Work](#) is another fun option where all dogs, purebred and mixed breed, are eligible to participate and search for a hidden target odor. Finally, [Agility](#) is a great sport for physical and mental exercise, as well as strengthening the dog-owner bond. Dig in and find true teamwork as you run your dog through tunnels and over jumps.