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DIGGING BEHAVIOR

Why dogs might dig:

1. Digging can be a fun and reinforcing activity for dogs as it helps them gain access to prey underground, such as rodents or even insects. Some dogs have been selectively bred to actively engage in this behavior, like terriers, but digging is not limited to just the terrier breeds.
A dog will also dig to gain access to any sort of tantalizing smell coming from below-ground. It could be an old piece of food, an acorn, manure/fertilizer you've put down in your garden plot, a bone or dead animal pelt. Although we may think the item he finds is gross, the dog will likely see it as quite a reinforcing prize.
2. Another time you'll see a dog engage in digging is when he wants to cache a tasty possession like a meaty bone for future access.
3. And finally, some dogs will dig in hot weather to reach cooler soil and then lie down in their excavated hole.

Depending on the motivation behind the digging, your solutions will differ.

For dogs that have a strong internal urge to dig (and that may default to this behavior when bored), and/or to catch underground prey (1):

- Consider engaging him in terrier trials, so he has an acceptable and highly enjoyable outlet for his urges.
- Fence off an area of your yard where the dog can dig to his heart's content.
- Create a 'digging pit' (Ian Dunbar idea) in one corner of your yard, something along the lines of a doggie sand box. Actively teach the dog to target this pit for his digging pleasure. Hide favored toys and/or treats below the surface so his digging efforts in this spot yield high-value reinforcers.
- Supervise the dog when he is outside, so that you can interrupt unwanted digging in your yard. If you've established a digging pit, redirect his efforts to that specific area.
- Supply fun alternatives for him to engage in, such as fetching, scavenging for scattered treats, hide and seek games with favorite toys, high-value chews, and/or food puzzles to keep him happily occupied. A dog that's been well-exercised both mentally and physically is less likely to engage in what we'd consider 'troublesome' behaviors.

For dogs that want to cache prizes for later access (2):

- Only allow the dog to have these items inside, or take away the item when the dog is done with it, giving it back to him at a later time.
- Direct him to his digging pit so his prize can be buried at an approved site.

For dogs that dig to create a cool pit for themselves (3):

- Keep the dog inside where there's a fan or A/C during really hot weather.
- Provide access to a densely shaded spot outside where it's cooler.
- Fill a tot-sized plastic pool with water so the dog can cool off periodically.
- Allow cool-pit digging in just one densely shaded area of the yard. This will require your supervision initially, so that you can interrupt your dog if he digs in a taboo area and then redirect him to the proper location. Moistening the ground in that particular location may make it more inviting, too.