

To avoid digging, keep dogs busy

Dogs dig because it's a natural behavior and they enjoy it.

Some dig a nice, cool spot where they can rest. Some dig to bury favorite toys. Others dig because they suspect there's something underground, such as a rodent or insect. Many dogs dig out of boredom, and there are also those lovable canines who dig merely to get our attention.

Susan Furukawa, animal welfare director at the Animal Rescue Foundation, has some ideas for preventing digging. Because it's a natural behavior, it won't be an overnight fix.

To curb the urge to dig, make sure your dog's physical and mental needs are met every day. Walk your dog regularly. Play fetch or Frisbee and hone his skills by using different balls or different locations.

If your dog enjoys other dogs, make scheduled visits to your local dog park. Playing



ELENA BICKER

PAWS AND CLAWS

and interacting appropriately with other dogs will also use up their excess energy.

Work on basic commands and tricks and practice daily for 10 minutes, keeping him mentally stimulated. Take a dog obedience course, where you'll practice mental and social skills.

Generally speaking, when dogs have enough exercise, they are more relaxed and more likely to enjoy lying around instead of getting into

mischief. If you've exercised your dog and think he's digging due to boredom, keep enrichment toys in your yard to keep him busy when you're not around. Items such as Kongs stuffed with kibble or treats are interesting and fun. Rotate the toys to make them new and exciting.

One alternative, especially for devoted diggers, is to train your dog to dig in an "approved" spot. Select an area in the yard where you can build a sandbox. Use a plastic wading pool if you don't want to build a box. The dirt box should be at least 12 inches deep.

After filling the box with dirt, moisten the soil and hide some toys in the box. Encourage your dog to dig and praise him for digging in his sandbox. If he goes to another spot in the yard to dig, interrupt the behavior with a loud noise, say "No dig!" and return

him to his new excavation site. Reward him only for digging in this designated area.

If your dog digs simply to get your attention, you should ignore him while he's performing this behavior. Remember that even saying "No" or stamping your foot is giving him attention.

Stay committed to giving your dog sufficient time with you so that he doesn't feel the need to misbehave in order to become noticed.

Regardless of the reason for your dog's digging, do not punish him after the fact. It will not correct the behavior and will cause him to be confused.

Look for ways to fill his time with exercise, play, restful naps and belly rubs.

Elena Bicker is the Executive Director of Tony La Russa's Animal Rescue Foundation. She can be reached at (925) 256-1ARF (1273)