Backyard Nuisance Behaviors

How to Curb Backyard Digging, Climbing/Jumping, Barking

The Escape Artist: Once your dog has figured out how to climb/jump out of your yard he is self-rewarded due to the fun of being loose to wander and run. It then becomes nearly impossible to curb this behavior without making some significant changes to how you allow your dog into the backyard. Take heart, these changes are short-term until you've trained your dog to no longer escape.

The Digger: Some dogs dig at the fence to try to escape the yard and enjoy the world around. Some dogs just love to dig as a form of entertainment. (See note** at the end of this document.)

The Fence-line Runner/Barker: This is a form of entertainment for many dogs but can also be due to anxiety about a neighboring dog (or human). If your dog experiences anxiety from neighboring dogs/humans try these techniques first but if they prove ineffective please let us know so we can introduce another form of training.

The following training protocol is a bit tedious at first because you have to be diligent about staying outside with your pet so that he doesn't have an opportunity to practice the unwanted behavior. You need to be right there to give him immediate feedback. With time, your dog will begin to learn that these behaviors simply don't work and you can then try some short (a few minutes) stints of walking back inside while still watching him from a window. If he does well with this, then you will *slowly and gradually* start to add more length of time that he is alone outside.

Step One: "A tired dog is a good dog!" Make sure your dog is getting plenty of exercise, both physical and mental. Just being outside in a backyard is not the same as constructive exercise. Give your dog something to do: walks, fetch, games to burn energy. Give him ways to exercise his brain as well: feed him meals via a puzzle toy, hide treats around the house and let him sniff them out, train him on basic obedience skills. Click on this link for more ideas on Canine Enrichment.

Step Two: Backyard management. For now, you will need to constantly monitor your dog when he is in the yard - he should not have any unattended time in the yard. ***This step is crucial to the success of training your dog.*** Remember, his digging/jumping/barking is self-rewarding and allowing him to practice this behavior

makes it extremely difficult to change/modify. Standing outside with him enables you to catch him in the act and give him an interruption plus redirect him to a more appropriate behavior.

Keep your dog on leash in the backyard for the time being. Instead of using a standard 6 ft leash use a long leash, 15-20 ft. This will give your dog the illusion of being loose in the backyard but the leash allows you to control your dog, get him away from the fence, and redirect his behavior.

Step Three: Feedback, Interrupt, Redirect. While outside, you will be giving him constant feedback about the choices he makes while he is out there. If he is choosing to do appropriate things like sniff around, use the bathroom, sunbathe, play, etc. then you will praise him and reward him. If he starts to do anything we don't like such as pacing back and forth along the fence, digging, attempting to jump up or climb, then you will need to promptly interrupt him with a verbal word or phrase such as "no" or "uh uh" or "out". To help him really learn what that phrase means, which is to stop doing what he is currently doing, you might need to "backup" your verbal interruption with a physical one such as spraying him 1-3 times with a squirt bottle of water (set the nozzle to stream, not mist). Example, if your dog chooses an undesirable behavior, you will interrupt him by saying "no" and then following up with a spray or two of water. You could also use a shake can to help interrupt him. A shake can is just a soda can that you have emptied and put a handful of pennies or rocks into so that when you shake it, it makes a louder disrupting sound. Some dogs are more responsive to either spray bottle or shake can, so you can experiment and see what is best for your dog. The goal is to momentarily startle him to stop him from what he is doing (jumping, barking, digging) and then you can call him away or lead him away and try to engage him in an appropriate activity such as sniffing (toss a treat on the ground) or playing with you (wiggle a toy in front of him or toss a ball). Redirection is key because if you only interrupt the bad behavior (use the spray bottle) and don’t redirect his attention onto something positive (give him something else to do) then he will likely go right back to the bad behavior.

Continue to reward the positive or desirable behaviors. If your dog heads towards the fence but then turns away on his own or just passes by then be sure to praise and reward him. We want to distinguish that he is allowed to walk near the fence, he just can't start jumping, digging, barking, or pacing back and forth.

Step Four: Recall (“Come”). It is very helpful to teach your dog a reliable recall or "come" when called. This skill is advanced because the end product is where your dog is off leash and you can trust that he will listen to you when you call him to you despite all the other "fun" things he might want to do. That is why this skill also

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takes some time to develop and train. You won't be able to reliably use it right away, so use a long leash in the meantime. Below are 2 training videos that demonstrate how to teach recall. Practicing in the backyard is a great place to start! Introduction to Recall and Intermediate Recall

Optional/Advanced Training Step: This step involves teaching your dog a "door routine". This step may not be necessary for your dog but it can be very useful for backyard behaviors as well as a number of other situations. Many dogs get very excited about entering the "fun" backyard and will bolt through the door and bee-line to the fence. When they do this their mind is already in a state of over-excitement, making it pretty difficult for them to listen to your commands. If you teach your dog to first sit at the doorway, give you eye-contact (check in with you), and wait for a release command, they will be entering the yard already primed to defer to you for guidance/permission. It sets a better, more calm, tone to how they enter the yard. At APA we find this skill so useful and important that we teach it to all dogs who spend time living at our shelter. Click on this link for a video tutorial on how to teach a "door routine".

** **Note for backyard digging**: Some dogs love to just dig and some people want to give their dog this outlet without destroying their backyard. You can purchase a plastic "kid pool", fill it with dirt and gravel or whatever is your dog's preferred digging material. You can also bury a few dog toys in this pool (optional). When your dog starts to dig where you don't want him to dig, give him a verbal correction (may need to also use the spray bottle or shake can) and then lead him to this "digging pool". Remember to praise him every time he chooses to dig there on his own.

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