



Destructive behaviour in dogs

HALL VETERINARY SURGERY BEHAVIOUR ADVICE



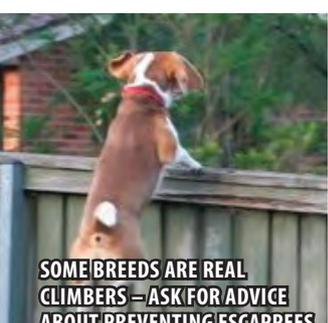
TO YOU IT'S A GARDEN HOSE – TO A DOG ITS A CHEW TOY. DON'T LEAVE IT OUT, AND PROVIDE DOG CHEW ITEMS LIKE RAWHIDES AND KONGS.



DIGGING IS A NATURAL DOG BEHAVIOUR – PROVIDE DIGGING PITS TO KEEP YOUR GARDEN HOLE FREE.



FURNITURE MAKES GREAT CHEW TOYS FOR YOUNG DOGS – PUPPY PROOF YOUR HOUSE AND PROVIDE CHEW TOYS.



SOME BREEDS ARE REAL CLIMBERS – ASK FOR ADVICE ABOUT PREVENTING ESCAPEES.



DIGGING OUT IS COMMON IN BORED DOGS – DAILY WALKS AND DEPARTURE TRAINING CAN FIX THIS.

Destructive behaviour in dogs takes many forms, from chewing a few pot-plants to the total destruction of an entire room. There are several methods to prevent, control or at least minimise the problem. As with any form of training or retraining, the solution entails commitment to—and involvement with—your dog. In the long run, the effort will be well repaid with a much better behaved pet who has had its physical and mental needs met.

CAUSES

BOREDOM: Not meeting a dog's physical and mental needs leads to boredom and this is the number one cause of destructive behaviour in dogs. Daily, or ideally, twice daily walks for a dog plus time spent with family members rather than isolated in the backyard will relieve boredom.

CHEWING: Pups explore the world with their mouth and during teething will frequently chew on any hard material available to relieve the pain in their gums, just as young children do. However, dogs don't know how to make the important distinction between an expensive table leg and a dog chew toy.

ESCAPING: Dogs that lack social contact will often escape and go looking for people or dogs to be with. Dogs left alone in backyards for long periods of time are prone to becoming escapees. To prevent this house train your dog to be okay in the house. If this is unacceptable to your house rules, then spend more time outdoors with your dog. Arranging for dog play dates can be another way to settle a dog but only get a second dog if you want one, not as a baby sitter for your current dog as you can double your problem rather than fix it. In some situations, destruction and escaping behaviour that only occurs when you are out is associated with separation anxiety. Seek help with a veterinary behaviourist if you suspect this distressing condition.

BOISTEROUS BEHAVIOUR: Dogs often jump up on people, they do this to solicit attention and perhaps to seek food. To prevent this behaviour teach the dog to sit/stay and ask it to sit/stay as you greet it. Do not say 'No', as that is actually rewarding the dog – they see this as acknowledgement not punishment. Do not push the dog down as that also rewards the behaviour with social contact. For the very boisterous dog have toys to throw away from you so the initial exuberant greeting energy is dissipated in the chase to get the toy. Calm greetings by people will also help calm the dog.

PREVENTION AND CURE

Once you have established the probable reasons for your dog's destructive behaviour, the cure may become obvious. Daily walks with lots of opportunity to stop and smell is the easiest way to mentally tire a dog. Taking young dogs for runs is inappropriate as you can damage their growth plates. Thirty minute walks with time to stop and sniff, twice a day keeps most dogs satiated. Providing appropriate chew items, sufficient social contact with family and other dogs will go a long way to settling a dog.

PLAYING: Have rules on games to prevent the dog getting too rough. For example, when playing tug-of-war make sure to teach a 'give' command where the dog drops the toy on command. If the dog's teeth touch your fingers then end the game. Teaching 'fetch' and 'give' are great games to teach dogs to provide an appropriate physical outlet. Games can be relationship building exercises between the dog and owner. Having a variety of safe toys that you rotate daily so they stay novel. Toys can be as simple as an empty milk carton with a treat inside—no need to spend lots of money on toys—they just need to be novel and safe.

OTHER HINTS

Put the obvious articles which the dog likes chewing, such as pot plants, shoes, mobile phones etc. out of reach. Provide chew items and safe toys and rotate these on a daily basis to maintain your dog's interest. Consider not feeding your dog from a food bowl but scattering dry biscuits around the backyard so the dog has a job to do to find their food. Fence off newly planted areas in the garden temporarily and provide a digging pit like a clam shell pool. Train your dog regularly to give it some 'work' to do or consider further obedience training. Walk your dog at least once a day, ideally twice daily. Use a long lead, 3–4 metres in length, to allow the dog to sniff and explore over a reasonable area, to investigate naturally, to use all its senses and do all the things dogs enjoy (within reason).

