

THWARTING THE ESCAPE ARTIST

Many dogs never even think of escaping from the confines of their home. Other dogs make a career of it. There are many reasons that a dog may become an escape artist. Certain breeds seem to have a genetic predisposition toward escapism. Siberian Huskies, Border Collies and many hunting dogs were bred to have a high drive for activity, like pulling sleds, herding sheep or working with a hunter. Not all of these dogs will have an escape problem, however. Unaltered dogs are driven to seek out a mate during their twice-yearly heats. Spaying and neutering are one of the few medical resolutions to wandering. The most common reason that a dog becomes an escape artist, however, is out of boredom. Just how bored would you get if you were left alone for hours and hours with no opportunity for entertainment or activity? Outside temptations can be virtually unavoidable in a deprived environment like that.

If you have a dedicated escape artist, you will need both physical barriers and psychological management to stop this behavior.

Here are five tips to build and maintain a better barrier:

- 1) Patrol your backyard on a regular basis so that you can repair broken boards, close up new openings and keep track of weaknesses in your fencing.
- 2) Pour a 1 foot deep concrete curb at the base of your fence to discourage digging out.
- 3) Try sprinkling cayenne pepper on the spots that your dog usually digs up.
- 4) Angle the top of your fence inward.
- 5) Remove any objects near the fence that can give your dog a "leg up" and over the fence.

It is also important that you understand why your dog is escaping. Recognize that dogs are very social animals and that leaving them in the backyard for hours can cause anxiety and a need to escape. You will need to address the cause of this anxiety, not just the symptoms of it.

Here are a few tips to make your yard a happier place for your dog:

- 1) Provide your dog with several good things to chew on. Chewing relieves stress.
- 2) Fill a safe bone or toy with peanut butter, pretzels or raisins. This will give him a nice form of entertainment at least for a while.
- 3) Buy a "food ball" for your pooch. This sort of ball has a maze on the inside and is filled with kibble (your dog's breakfast, perhaps). It can take quite a while for him to roll the ball around to get to the last bit of food.
- 4) If your dog digs to escape, give him a child's plastic pool filled with dirt or sand. Bury a few dog treats in it for your dog to discover. This can become an outlet for his need to dig and supplies him with an activity.

It is especially important to give your dog plenty of exercise before his hours of confinement. You could even enroll your dog in a doggie daycare program once a week or so.

If all else fails, there are anti-jumping harnesses that can be ordered from some pet supply companies. The most important thing, however, is to form a strong bond with your dog. Play with him, talk to him, and spend time with him. Content dogs are more likely to stay at home.

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