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perth's *dog whisperer*

Respected dog behaviour consultant Kathy Kopellis McLeod is a welcome addition to the HOME team. Her monthly column, which starts today, aims to help us live more harmoniously with our pooches.

Q How do I stop my dog from destroying my garden?
A It's no secret that dogs can make a gorgeous garden look like a battlefield in no time, making for many infuriating interactions with your pooch. The good news is that there are easy and effective ways to help conquer the conflict. If you're a dog owner and a green thumb, you'll need to compromise and "think dog" in order to prevent your pet from ruining your yard. The first step is to acknowledge that digging is a natural behaviour for dogs. The second step is to take into account your dog's individual needs, breed tendencies and personality when considering which strategies will help achieve your main goal, namely redirecting their attention away from your plants towards a more appropriate alternative.

Here are some suggestions for entertaining and distracting your dog, and enjoying a better looking garden to boot:

- 1 See if you can pinpoint why your dog is being destructive. Common reasons include boredom, frustration, anxiety, curiosity and wanting to have fun by digging around in some delightfully scented manure. If you know what triggers your pooch, tackling the issue will be easier.

- 2 Allocate your dog a designated digging pit under a shady tree or in a spot that they prefer. Motivate them to revisit the pit by burying new toys and big treats just under the surface for them to seek out. Alternatively, fill a wading pool with fresh water, which is especially appealing during the summer months.
- 3 Dogs are scavengers and love to forage, so scatter their biscuits across your pavers instead of feeding them from a bowl. Making your dog work for their food is also a great way to keep them active. Treasure hunts are great fun and keep your dog busy by incorporating sight and scent work to seek out their treasure. The prize could be dog biscuits, a pig's ear, rawhide, a raw meaty bone, etc, but remember to keep your pet's daily food quota in mind and if you have any queries about diet consult your veterinarian.
- 4 Place ice-cream container-size ice blocks in your dog's water bowls to help keep them cool and entertained on warm days.
- 5 While initially training your dog, barricade your plants to protect them from being damaged. Once your dog knows the rules, the barriers can be removed.
- 6 Treat balls, which have to be nudged around to empty, can mentally stimulate your dog. Varying the treats daily enhances the surprise factor and sustains interest for longer. Occupy your dog with an interactive food toy such as a Kong filled with soft, moist foods for them to remove.
- 7 A favourite pastime for many dogs is sleeping on beds and couches. Providing them with something similar outside lets them sprawl out and relax, instead of being destructive.
- 8 Finally, don't forget that plants and lawn can be replaced while your best friend can't!

* www.kathysdogtraining.com.au



KATHY KOPELLIS McLEOD



The respected WA dog behaviour consultant helps us understand our canine companions

Kathy with her Siberian husky Windy. Picture: Theo Fakos



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