

Dog Friendly Gardening



Gardening with one of your best friends is always a good thing, unless your friend also likes to dig in your daylilies, wear a path through your peonies and trample your tulips. Creating a dog friendly landscape takes observation and begins with thinking like a dog.

It also means learning forgiveness. Many breeds have internal traits you will not be able to change. Terriers like to dig, hunting breeds like to run, and most all dogs like to patrol and protect their territory. When designing your landscape, think of your dog's needs as another factor, just like soil type or plant hardiness.

Running Path

Most dogs create their own paths through the garden and along fence lines. Trying to redirect them can cause stress for both of you. Instead, hardscape their routes into "official" pathways. Plant alongside their path, not on it. Where the path creates a visual interruption, plant a hedge row to obscure its view. Ornamental grasses are tough border plants and effective at controlling paths.

Planting in raised beds or on berms bordered with a wall and starting with larger plants can alter a dog's path. Line the path with gentle hardscapes like pavers, flat stones, or comfy mulch and not rocks. This will also lower the amount of mud when it's wet. Use fencing to exclude furry friends from areas that are off limits. If the exterior of your property has lots of foot traffic, consider a solid wood fence to block the stimulation created by this traffic.

Garden Etiquette

If you don't want your dog in certain planting beds, be consistent and use a word like "out" when they step into that bed. Be sure everyone in your household uses the same word and tone of voice. When your dog steps out of the bed, praise him.

"Leave it" is also a great phrase to teach your dog to drop his attention off something of intense interest.

And if you haven't taken your dog to an obedience class, give it a try. You will learn the importance of firm, loving consistency and your dog will learn they need to listen to you. Plus, there is an instructor to help guide you both.

Waste Spot

Create a potty spot and train your dog to eliminate there just like you trained her not to potty in the house. It doesn't need to be overly large, but a place to go that protects your lawn or shrubs from urine's high nitrogen content and saves you from searching the whole yard for waste.

An inviting spot may include various elements:

- Soft pea gravel, bricks, flagstone or wood mulch.
- Artificial turf over a gravel pit base.
- A location he will use when it rains or snows.
- For male dogs, add a marking post. Be creative! Use a tree stump, an artificial fire hydrant or fun statue. It doesn't need to be large, just something to aim at.

Dog waste belongs in the trash and not your garden compost. Female dogs concentrate their urine in one spot, creating dead spots. Regularly diluting their urine by watering helps save your lawn.

Sensible Plants

To lessen eye injuries, avoid planting thorny plants in easily-accessible areas. Do your research and avoid planting poisonous plants. While no list is exhaustive, start with www.asPCA.org/toxicplants. Also, keep plants like foxtail out of your garden. Their seeds have barbs that create ear problems.

If your dog likes to chew on plants, use a word like “ouch.” Start indoors and when your puppy bites sharply declare, “ouch!” and stop moving until they release. Over time, ouch will be associated with not using the mouth and you can use it to train the dog to leave plants alone.

Shade and Sun

Watch where your dog likes to bask in the sun or retreat in the shade. Make it comfortable with soft bedding, like mulch. If you have a sunny yard, create some instant shade with a tarp or parasol. Consider investing in a doghouse. Place the water bowl nearby.

Destructive Habits

Extra energy and boredom create destructive habits. Release your dog’s energy by walking, playing fetch or going to an off-leash dog park regularly. Don’t leave your dog in the yard for long periods of time without something to keep him or her occupied. Use dog toys, a hard plastic swimming pool filled with water, an old bicycle tire or sports ball...anything you can find that can become a safe toy.

If your dog likes to dig, first determine the reason and tailor the solution to the problem. Is he looking for entertainment? Prey? A cool spot to lay? For entertainment, create a sandy digging spot. Hide toys in

it for him to find. If he prefers his own location, encourage the one most favorable to you and discourage others by filling and covering with large stones, chicken wire or chain link. Areas with bare soil are more inviting, so plant solidly, use a groundcover planting or cover with mulch.

If she likes to chew on wood features, give her a toy filled with hidden goodies. Also try spraying the area she chews on with a product like bitter apple.

Other Considerations

If you’ve dreamed of including a water feature in your landscape, consider the following:

- If in-ground, make sure the edges have steps for your dog to get out if he falls in. If he likes getting in the water, reconsider an in-ground pond for a disappearing fountain, a “pond in a pot” or a dry stream bed that alludes to water.
- When purchasing mulch, avoid mulch from cocoa shells. Chocolate is poisonous to dogs and the food-like aroma may cause her to eat it.

In Summary

Creating a dog friendly garden is the best way for you and your dog to enjoy the warmth of each other’s company when you are both outside!

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