



Designing for Dogs in the Garden

Introduction

About half of all US households have at least one dog. In a yard of any size, you can create an outdoor space that is stimulating and safe for your dog and compatible with your own gardening needs and vision. Dogs need water, shade, and shelter. An enriched environment can help keep your dog active and healthy, protect your pet from environmentally related illnesses and increase the pleasure of being outdoors with your pets.

Creating an Enriched Environment

Romping - Young and active dogs need a place to romp and fetch, which can be hard on lawns. Dog urine is nitrogen rich, and female dog urine especially can leave brown spots. Consult your veterinarian about diet, hydration and medications that support healthy urine pH. Consider overplanting with resilient grasses or clover, or trying other types of sturdy, attractive ground cover for the play area. Set up a DIY agility course for exercise and play and keep plenty of toys outside.

Paths - Watch where your dog naturally roams and create paths throughout the yard. Dogs especially enjoy running the fence line. With some training, most dogs can learn what is shared territory and what is off limits. Mulch dog paths with shredded bark or wood chips to reduce the amount of mud and muck tracked in during rainy weather. Avoid cacao or dyed mulches which can be toxic for dogs. Add a grated peep hole, see-through gate, acrylic dome window or viewing platform so your dog can check out sights and smells of the neighborhood.

Scent and Digging - A dog's sense of smell is 10,000-100,000 times better than a human's. Every spade of earth turned over is a delight to your dog. New plantings, plants in pots, and critters like moles and gophers will especially attract diggers. Dogs like terriers were bred to hunt burrowing prey. Protect tender plants and new bedding areas with portable metal, wood or bamboo barriers.

Toys - Dogs have dichromatic vision and primarily see shades of blue, yellow and gray. The average dog has 20/75 vision but has better motion detection and night vision than humans. Choose sturdy toys that are mostly blue and white for easy fetching. Hide toys and treats along your dog's paths to encourage exploration. All the best toys have squeakers.

Water - Provide shallow water activities during the summer months to prevent overheating. Wading pools designed for children are an excellent choice. Dump water when not in use.

Health and Safety

Dogs face three primary risks in their own yards. These are: 1) diseases and intestinal parasites transmitted by other dogs, wild animals, or insects, 2) toxic or poisonous plants, and 3) harmful chemicals used for gardening or household chores.

Pet Waste - An average size dog produces 275 pounds of poop per year. This mound of waste is a hazard to your family and your pet. Pet waste can contain bacteria like E. coli, parasites like

Giardia, plus worms and viruses that are not killed by either home or municipal composting. Dogs can be trained to eliminate in designated areas to facilitate clean up. Flush pet waste down a toilet or pick it up in small bags and place in the general garbage. Get waste off the ground quickly.

Birdbaths and Feeders - Birdbaths and feeders can become contaminated with bacteria, parasites, algae, and other diseases from wildlife. Drinking or wading in birdbath water can lead to illnesses like leptospirosis and giardiasis, as well as poisoning from harmful algae. Keep birdbaths elevated so that your dog cannot drink the water. Use gloves to clean birdbaths frequently with a diluted vinegar solution. If algae are present, clean with a diluted bleach solution and rinse thoroughly.

Toxic Plants - Numerous common plants are toxic or hazardous to pets. Grapes, chives, onions and garlic, rhododendrons, and azaleas are toxic. Other common toxic plants are English ivy, daffodils, tulips, hyacinths, crocuses, and many mushrooms. Observe your dog in the yard and identify, isolate or remove toxic plants as necessary. Many bulbs are poisonous; keep bulbs away from your dog before planting and check the area for digging after you plant. Remember to also check your house plants for toxicity. *If you are concerned that your pet has ingested a toxin, call the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Hotline, 1-888-426-4435, or the Pet Poison Helpline, 1-855-764-7661.*

Toxic Chemicals - Toxic chemicals in lawn treatments, pesticides, herbicides and rodenticides can be especially hazardous to pets who walk on or through treated areas and absorb chemicals from licking their paws and fur. Read labels carefully before using pesticides and restrict access to treated areas. Consider using slug and snail bait containing iron phosphates instead of metaldehyde. Use rodenticides only in areas that cannot be accessed by pets or children and be aware of secondary poisoning that occurs when pets and wildlife eat poisoned rodents.

Wildlife - Coyotes, cougars and racoons increasingly share urban spaces with humans and pets. Keep small dogs (and all cats) indoors at dawn and dusk. Use hazing techniques to drive wild animals off if spotted when walking your dog. Racoons sometimes forage in small packs and are fierce fighters when they tangle with dogs. Their bites and scratches can transmit rabies, roundworms and leptospirosis. Keep all pets and pet food inside at night and secure dog doors.

Resources

Poisonous Plants, Oregon Veterinary Medicine Association,

<https://www.oregonvma.org/care-health/companion-animals/health-safety/poisonous-plants>

Why You Should Keep Your Birdbath Clean, Audubon,

<https://www.audubon.org/magazine/whyyou-should-keep-your-birdbath-clean>

National Pesticide Information Center, Pets and Pesticide Use Fact Sheet

<https://npic.orst.edu/factsheets/petspest.html>

For more detailed information about pesticides, email npic@oregonstate.edu

Make Your Garden More Climate-Resilient: Lawns, 10-Minute University Handout

<https://cmastergardeners.org/10-minute-university/handouts/>

Portland Urban Coyote Project. Coyote Sightings in the Portland metro. www.portlandcoyote.com

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