

DIGGING For Gold; Gravel; Gas; Gardening: Coal and Oil

The above title names but a few reasons why humans like to dig. In particular, if there were no buried gold, oil or gas, then you wouldn't find humans investing billions of dollars each year to dig up the seabeds. Dogs dig for resources too; only theirs consist of voles, mice, rats, roots or even a slither of yummy cat faeces. However, it is possible to create a doggy version of a gold mine, but before I describe how to go about this, I will explain why other methods commonly used for combating digging are doomed to failure!

When we catch our canine friends digging in the flowerbeds this is usually what happens:

"Rover, Rover, don't dig there, bad dog!" "Whoops", thinks Rover, "mum's angry with me again" he then looks around to discover that mum has disappeared back inside the house ... and Rover starts to dig again.

"Rover, ROVER - I thought I told you NOT to dig just there, you BAD DOG". Mum goes back inside ... and Rover starts to dig again.

"Ohhhhh nooooo: ROVER - NOW I AM REALLY ANOID" (mum races out and slaps Rover across the rear end) "NOW DO AS YOU ARE TOLD.

Rover waits a few minutes, ponders on what the fuss was all about, and then wonders why human temperament is so unpredictable (Rover then considers telephoning Dr. Roger Mugford, who like Fran, is also a human psychologist) and then returns to the all important job of .. digging.

So, what has gone wrong? Without Rover's mum realizing what she is doing, she has managed to teach Rover that it is not a good idea to dig whilst she is around. So what should you do if you don't like having your garden rearranged on a regular basis?

All of my dogs have enjoyed a spot of digging at some point during their lives; therefore I have provided them with an area where their digging doesn't cause any problems. What's more, Nalle and Lotte have come to understand that it is their personal patch. This may sound rather crazy, but it is really very effective:

To start with, I took a very small area of garden that I felt I could sacrifice. In fact the area is precisely hole sized. I then took my gardening tools, old bones, stuffed bones, stuffed Kongs etc. and began digging (looking around every so often to check that the neighbours weren't watching). I then placed all the bits and pieces inside the hole and covered it all back in. Next I called the dogs out to investigate - "look kids - what's in here?" - I began scratching at the surface. Very quickly both dogs were investigating the area and then started digging. Eventually "Wow, what have I found here?" Lotte pulls out a stuffed bone, and Nalle finds a stuffed Kong toy". Another day Lotte finds her favourite squeaky ball, and Nalle finds another stuffed bone.

For a while I filled the dogs digging pit on a regular basis, but now I only fill it VERY occasionally. This keeps the reward very much on a random basis, which means that the learning process goes in at a very deep rooted level.

Quite recently I did a house visit for a lady who requested private puppy training. I was quite surprised when she informed me that she had already done something about the puppy's digging. When I enquired what exactly she had done she replied "I built a digging pit with some sand, and then buried a few of her toys and a stuffed bone, now she goes to that spot all the time". Evidently she read this in a book about puppy training. So I was really pleased that she had found herself a good book'