



Dogs & Backyards

People often tell me that their dog needs lots of space and a big backyard to roam in while they're away. Dogs are all individuals and respond differently to different environments. However, a backyard where squirrels run along fences, neighbor's dogs are barking at the fence line, and other exciting things are going on, is not always the best place for your dog to hang out while you're away.

Most dogs do not frolic and run around happily in large spaces when their people leave. Instead, they find a small spot on the couch or chair, and curl up to sleep until you come home.

There are dogs that do fine hanging out in their backyard while their people are away, but many do not. These dogs do not exercise themselves in a healthy way, and the exposure to sights and noises that they can't interact with can make them frustrated, nervous and anxious. Some will dig to get out of the yard where they can easily get into trouble or get hit by cars. Others will become destructive, chewing on inappropriate items or digging up your landscaping.

Dogs that live in backyards full-time, and are never allowed in the house, tend to disassociate from their family members and are often under-socialized. They also don't learn to live in the house and learn house rules. A vicious cycle may ensue where owners feel they just can't have the dog in the house at all. This is simply due to the lack of training and exposure to the house.

For owners who are worried the dog will do damage while they are out, the answer is to find a smaller place to contain your dog inside, such as a small room or crate. This way he's not exposed to the excitement of the goings-on outside, and can rest, chew on a bone or toy, and relax until his folks get home.

Many people believe that containing their dog in a smaller space is cruel, when that is simply not the case. It is thought that dogs are den animals. In the wild, many canid species use a small cave to give birth to pups or for protection while sleeping. And as long as the crate is used for an appropriate amount of time, it's possible that your dog may feel more relaxed, protected and happier in his "den".

However, you don't have to use a crate, you can also use a small room, or, if your dog knows the house rules, he can just stay inside the house. The idea is to keep your dog inside, protected and happy when you are away.

If your dog is having behavior issues while left unattended in the backyard, or if you are having trouble getting your dog to adjust to a crate, please call a trainer for help. Behavior issues are often easily solved with the right approach.

Marthina McClay, CPDT-KA
Director, Our Pack, Inc.