



Great gardens guidelines

August 2011

Proper enclosure is vital

Make sure your perimeter fencing is secure and decide where your dog or cat is and is not allowed to go within the garden. One way to allow your cat to enjoy the great outdoors without supervision is to have a secure cat enclosure, with access back to the house. For dogs, decide where the dog is allowed to go and stick to the rules. Your dog can't be expected to know that it is OK to walk on a garden bed if it is full of weeds but not when it is full of flowers. It is better to make the garden beds "no go" areas at all times.

Toileting

Provide areas where your dog or cat can toilet and keep them clean at all times. Another option is litter trays or a pet loo, both of which will require regular cleaning.

Risks to your pet

Snail bait is a real risk to pets and unfortunately can be eaten in an amount that is lethal just from the small amount of pellets sprinkled around a garden. We strongly recommend the non-toxic methods of snail control such as a deep saucer of beer that cannot be accessed by your dog but will kill the snails.

Some garden mulches contain particular ingredients, such as cocoa bean shells, that can be lethal to dogs and cats. Mulch bags do not always carry a warning about risks to pets so always check whether the product you're purchasing is potentially toxic and supervise or secure your pets to ensure they don't eat any mulch.

Other hidden dangers include compost, spiders and – in some areas – snakes and toads.

Many common garden plants can be poisonous to pets and should either be avoided altogether or planted in areas that your pet cannot access. Daphne, asparagus fern, aloe vera, jasmine, chrysanthemums, azaleas and rhododendrons, most bulbs and even sweet peas and daffodil bulbs are dangerous to dogs. Other plants such as wandering jew, cactus and nettles present the same risk to pets as they do to humans and should be kept out of the garden.

If you think your pet may have eaten or come into contact with something poisonous in the garden, contact your vet immediately as prompt attention is critical if your pet is to have any chance of survival. If you can, bring in the packet or a small cutting of the type of shrub you think the pet has come in contact with as this will help with a speedy diagnosis and treatment.

Digging

One thing that can be problematic for pet owners' gardens is digging - it is a common behaviour of many dogs, but it is certainly not a behaviour desired by many people.

Some breeds of dog are much more likely to dig than others, for example, the Jack Russell Terrier, Fox Terrier, Siberian Husky and Dachshund. The Terriers and Dachshunds were developed to "go to ground", ie to follow the quarry into the underground den and to dig or drive it out. The Siberian Husky, in his native country, dug cavities in the snow for protection and in a suburban backyard he can still be an enthusiastic excavator.

Many dogs are simply attracted to the smell of freshly turned soil and may only be tempted to dig in the flower bed or vegetable garden.

It is always easier to prevent undesirable behaviour in puppies than to try and alter a bad habit once it has developed. Young pups should be told a firm "no" when they are caught digging, then redirected to do something else and praised when they do. A small fence around garden beds should be sufficient to keep young puppies away from freshly dug soil.

Older dogs who are diggers must be confined to areas where they cannot dig and allowed access to the lawn or garden only under supervision so they can be stopped and told 'no'. You must redirect the dog to something else.

Dogs left alone at home all day are often the worst offenders. Bored dogs can even dig under fences to escape. In these cases, the fence lines must be secured or the dog must be confined to prevent escape and possible injury on the roads.

Dogs that dig from boredom should be given lots of exercise and more things to do, such as raw bones to chew on and treat balls to play with.

Finally, keep your pet happy and stimulated – and have fun together

Both cats and dogs can be destructive if they are bored so provide plenty of exercise and stimulation for your pets and enjoy your time in the garden with them.