

Is Your Dog a Houdini?

Does your dog's ability to escape from the back yard have you convinced that he's nothing less than a "Hairy Houdini"? Your never-ending attempts to keep your pet confined to your yard may seem comical at times, but every escape opens up the possibility of tragic consequences. If your dog is running loose, he's in danger of being hit by a car, injured in a fight with another dog, or hurt in any number of other ways.

You're also liable for any damage or injury your dog may cause, and you may be required to pay a fine if he's picked up by an animal control agency. To prevent escapes, you'll need to find out how your dog is getting out of the yard and, more importantly, why he's so determined to get out.

Why Dogs Escape

Social Isolation/Frustration

Your dog may be escaping because he's bored and lonely, especially if:

- He is left alone for long periods of time without opportunities for interaction with you.
- His environment is relatively barren, without playmates or toys.
- He is a puppy or adolescent (under three years old) and doesn't have other outlets for his energy.
- He is a particularly active type of dog (like the herding or sporting breeds) who needs an active "job" in order to be happy.
- He visits places after each escape that provide him with interaction and fun things to do. For example, he may go play with a neighbor's dog or visit the local schoolyard to play with the children.

Recommendations

We recommend expanding your dog's world and increasing his "people time" in the following ways:

- Walk your dog daily. It's good exercise, both mentally and physically (for both of you).
- Teach your dog to fetch a ball or Frisbee[®] and practice with him as often as possible.
- Teach your dog a few commands or tricks. Try to hold a lesson every day for five to 10 minutes.
- Take an obedience class with your dog and practice what you've learned every day.
- Provide interesting toys (Kong[®]-type toys filled with treats or "busy-box" toys) to keep your dog busy when you're not home.
- Rotate your dog's toys to make them seem new and interesting.
- Keep your dog inside when you're unable to supervise him. (This will also keep him safe and prevent any possibility of his being stolen from your yard.)

If you must be away from home for extended periods of time, take your dog to work with you or to a "doggie day care center," or ask a friend or neighbor to walk your dog.

Sexual Roaming

Dogs become sexually mature at around six months of age. Like a teenager first feeling the surge of hormones, an intact male dog has a strong, natural drive to seek out females. As you can imagine, it can be difficult to prevent an intact dog from escaping when his motivation to do so is very high.

Recommendations

Have your male dog neutered. Studies show that neutering will decrease sexual roaming in about 90 percent of cases. If an intact male has established a pattern of escaping, he may continue to do so even after he's neutered, which is even more reason to have him neutered as soon as possible. Have your female dog spayed. If your intact female dog escapes your yard while she's in heat, she'll probably get pregnant (and she could be impregnated even if she stays in your yard). Millions of unwanted pets are euthanized every year. Please don't contribute to the pet overpopulation problem by allowing your female dog to breed indiscriminately.

Courtesy Cleveland Animal Protective League – www.clevelandapl.org