

# Escape Artists: Fence Jumpers, Fence Climbers, & Diggers

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Some tenacious, smart dogs can become escape artists if they are unsupervised in their backyards and are allowed to rehearse this behavior; the same goes for digging in the yard. Some dogs can jump over fences, while others climb fences, and some dig under fences. This usually occurs if they become bored, feel trapped, or if they see or smell something on the other side of the fence that they want to investigate further. Always go outside with your new dog and monitor them in the backyard for the first couple of weeks to make sure that they don't try to escape the yard. We also recommend that they drag a long leash or rope so that, should they try to escape your yard, you will have an easier time catching them. There are some very easy, cheap, and effective ways to help deter a dog from digging in the yard or from jumping or climbing your fence.

## Fence Jumpers/Climbers:

- *Privacy Fence:* If you can afford it, you can always build a taller fence. A six-foot privacy fence keeps most dogs safely contained. A privacy fence also acts as a visual barrier for your dog should you have a dog that becomes reactive and barks aggressively when it sees wildlife, cats, people walking by, etc. You do have to be careful with some dogs because they can figure out, particularly in the corners, how to use the inside support horizontal beams as a way to get traction when jumping the fence. You can always have the fence company put the support beams on the outside of the fence. Planting thorny bushes or pine trees in the corners can help deter some dogs as well.



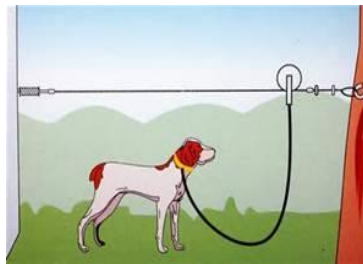
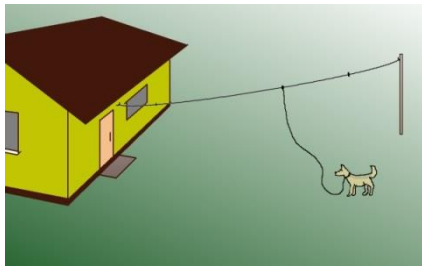
- *Inverted Fence:* Inverted fences are installed on the top of the existing fence, and it curves into the yard. It is made of various types of inexpensive and easy-to-install materials: plastic mesh, wire cables, hardware cloth.



- *Roller Bars:* They were originally used to keep coyotes out of yards and chicken coops. These can help keep your dog in your yard because, as your dog attempts to grip the top of your fence, the bar rolls. They are installed at the top inside perimeter of the fence. The materials used to make roller bars are PVC piping, cable, and hardware that is inexpensive.



- *Trolley Zip-Lines, Tie-outs:* It is not a good idea to keep a dog on a tie-out for long periods because it can cause behavioral problems. These are only recommended for short-term use for when the fence is unable to be fixed at the current time or zoning laws don't allow for a taller fence. The dog should only be on the tie-out long enough for a bathroom break.



- *Invisible, Underground Electric Fences:* We don't encourage the use of electric underground fences because there are many things that can go wrong with them:
  - You may not notice when the batteries on the electric collar die
  - You may forget to put the collar back on or turn it back on after taking your dog to the groomer, vet, dog park, etc.
  - Your dog's prey drive may be strong enough that they ignore the shock from the collar (regardless of how high the voltage is set) as they go to chase a rabbit, squirrel, skateboard, etc.
  - Once your dog bolts out through the perimeter of the electric fence, they may get stuck on the outside and be unable to come back home for fear of being shocked when returning

If you feel the need to try an underground electric fence, it's very important that you purchase a system with a collar that will emit a tone that warns the dog that they are close to the perimeter and close to being shocked. You may want to also consider putting up little yard flags along the inside perimeter of the electric fence so that your dog also visually sees its boundaries. This is the most effective and humane way of teaching a dog the boundaries of your underground electric fence.

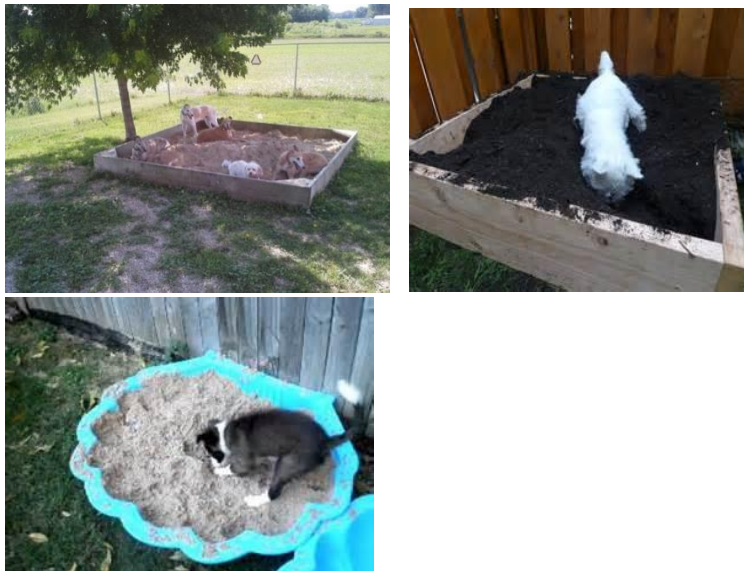
**Diggers:** Dogs dig for many reasons: It is fun, they are trying to find a cool place to lie down or bury something special, they are hunting for moles, or they dig to get out of the yard because there are more exciting things to smell and explore on the other side of the fence. Digging is considered a nuisance behavior because it can cause damage to the lawn and other landscaping, and it can be unsafe for your dog if they are escaping your yard.

- *Dogs that dig to escape:* Metal or plastic garden mesh sold in tractor supply stores can be attached at the bottom of the fence to extend it onto the yard and then staked down. You can also put cinder blocks along the inside perimeter of the fence to keep your dog from digging right at the bottom of the fence. You can also extend your fencing into the ground by digging farther down into the soil to extend the chain link or metal mesh underground.

You can also purchase a product called Dig Defence, which is easy to hammer down into the ground; a picture is shown below.



- *Dogs that dig randomly in the yard:* Digging is a normal, natural behavior for all dogs, and some breeds, such as terriers, dig more than others. Build your dog its own dig box or sandbox and encourage them to dig in that area by showing them partially buried toys or bones in the box.



- *Teach your dog not to dig:* Keep your dog on leash when you let them out. When they start to dig, say “leave it” and give them a treat for coming to you and leaving the ground alone. If they don’t stop, use the leash to pull them to you to interrupt the behavior; then try again. You can also redirect their digging to their dig box if they start to dig in areas of the yard that you don’t want them digging in.

**Training to deter escape artists:** Name recognition, a good recall, and “leave it” should be trained to known escape artists. Repetition is key when teaching all of these behaviors. The dog needs to understand what is being asked of them, and they should be rewarded with high-value treats to help reinforce these more desirable behaviors. If they do not understand, then you need to practice the training in a less distracting indoor area first and possibly reevaluate the rewards you are using. To learn how to train these three behaviors, please see the links below.

- *Name Recognition:* Used to get their attention if they are near the fence or digging; then you can tell the dog to come.
- *Leave It:* Used when they put their paws on the fence and are attempting to jump or climb or are digging.
- *Come:* Can be used after you say “leave it” or if they have escaped the yard. As long as recall is reliable and you’ve practiced in distracting environments with a long leash, they should come back to you.

***If, after trying these suggestions, you are still experiencing undesirable behaviors in your dog, SUBMIT QUESTIONS by clicking the link under Ask A Trainer on the Behavior and Training page of the Wayside Waifs website: [www.waysidewaifs.org](http://www.waysidewaifs.org).***

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**Additional links and information:**

<https://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-behavior/teaching-your-dog-come-when-called>

<http://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-behavior/teaching-your-dog-leave-it>

<http://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-behavior/escaping-yard>

<http://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-behavior/digging>