

Protecting Your Lawn from Your Dog and Your Dog from Your Lawn

Our topics for this week are:

- **How dogs can hurt your lawn**
- **How your lawn can hurt your dog**

Some dogs can and will cause damage to lawns, particularly from urine burns and digging. Conversely, lawn treatments, if handled improperly, can cause harm to dogs.

Types of Lawn Damage Caused by Dogs

Urine Burns

Repeated exposure to the ammonia in urine can cause burn spots in lawns. This most often occurs from female dogs, sexually intact or spayed, because they generally empty their urinary bladder in one place. Male dogs' urine is the same as females, but their urination habits are different. Males tend to urinate small amounts in many locations to mark their territory. However, any dog that voids in one location can cause lawn burns, including many senior dogs of either gender.

It is not possible to change a dog's instinctive method of voiding urine, nor is it possible to safely alter the composition of dog urine so that it does not cause lawn burn spots. Therefore, if a dog causes lawn burns, it must be limited where it can urinate. A portion of the yard can be fenced off and the area covered with hardwood mulch to create a safe elimination area. If you consistently provide praise and treats after urination in the fenced area, your dog may be more inclined to wait to urinate in the preferred area. Some may seek it out on their own to urinate, but this will require consistent rewards for at least weeks.

Products are sold that contain components like vinegar, baking soda, or hydrogen peroxide to neutralize the urine before or after elimination. Neutralizing the urine in the body can be hazardous by increasing the risk of urinary infections or the formation of bladder stones. Neutralizing the urine after it is on the lawn is laborious and too late to prevent most damage to the grass.

Digging Holes

Breeds of dogs that were selectively bred to hunt rodents have a strong instinct to dig. This is typically true of dogs of the terrier group. Digging may be motivated by hunting burrowing animals such as moles and voles, a desire to create a cache for food or toys, or a desire to escape enclosure.

Distracting the dog with toys, playmates, or lots of time with you may help, but generally dogs that continue to dig after a year of age, must be confined to a grassless area of the yard where digging can be tolerated. The digging pen is best sand or mulch. When outside the digging pen the dog should be on a leash.

Dog Damage Possible from Lawns

Fertilizers, weed control chemicals, and insecticides used on lawns can be hazardous if ingested or inhaled by dogs. If application is performed according to manufacturer's directions, the risks are low. Clumps of granules spilled in the yard, grass still wet from liquid applications, or granules that have not yet been washed into the soil can be dangerous. Spilled clumps of granules need to be scooped up and properly disposed. Spread granules should be rinsed into the soil and the lawn allowed to dry, and sprayed liquid chemicals should thoroughly dry on the lawn before dogs have access to a yard.

If you have comments or you're interested in particular animal handling subjects, contact us at CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com

Now let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- 1. There are no proven effective medications to give your dog to prevent urine burns to lawns.**
- 2. Granular lawn treatments should be rinsed onto the soil and liquid lawn treatments should be dried on the lawn before dogs have access to a treated yard.**
- 3. Some dog breeds are more likely to dig in a lawn because the breed was selectively bred for the digging trait to hunt burrowing prey.**

More information on animal handling can be found in my books, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, *Concise Textbook of Small Animal Handling*, and *Concise Textbook of Large Animal Handling* all published by CRC Press and available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is provided at: www.betteranimalhandling.com . This website has more than 200 past podcasts with notes on handling of dogs, cats, other small mammals, birds, reptiles, horses, cattle, small ruminants, swine, and poultry.

Don't forget, serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.