

The 'Airbnb' of Dog Parks: A Private Space to Run and Play

It's no secret that dog parks can be breeding grounds for infectious disease, along with the potential for attack by another dog. In this study of urban dog parks, hookworm eggs were found in every soil sample tested. This growing alternative to public dog parks helps eliminate those downsides.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- There are a number of reasons why dog park alternatives are necessary; the potential for dog-to-dog or dog-to-human aggression is real, as is the potential for disease transmission
- Akin to the "Airbnb" of dog parks, the startup Sniffspot allows you to rent out a private space by the hour so your dog can run and play
- Sniffspot allows dog owners to rent backyards and other private spaces across the U.S. so they can have a dog-park-like experience without the risks
- While some dog owners dislike the idea of a private dog park because their dogs would miss socializing with other pups, a Sniffspot survey found 1 in 7 dogs have been attacked at a dog park
- You can search for private spaces with amenities that appeal to your dog, such as water areas, hiking trails, farm animal sightings and agility parks

Having a secure outdoor spot for your dog to romp and roam is essential to his physical and mental health. If you're lucky enough to have a secure backyard, this — along with regular walks and vigorous playtime — can provide this conveniently. However, many dog owners live in urban areas, townhomes or apartments and need a place where their dog can explore.

In the U.S. there are more than 800 dog parks¹ that serve this purpose, but there are often significant downsides. This is why increasing interest in alternatives to public dog parks is growing — and there are likely options in your area. Akin to the "Airbnb" of dog parks, the startup Sniffspot allows you to rent out a private space by the hour so your dog can run and play without other dogs around.

Downsides to Public Dog Parks

There are a number of reasons why dog park alternatives are necessary. The potential for dog-to-dog or dog-to-human aggression is real, as is the potential for disease transmission. In fact, dog parks can be breeding grounds for infectious diseases, which is why I don't recommend visits to the dog park until a puppy is at least 6 months old.

In a study of urban dog parks in Portugal, every soil sample tested was contaminated with hookworm eggs.² Another study of dog parks in Northern California found enteropathogens, or organisms that causes diseases of the intestinal tract, were common in visiting dogs. Enteropathogens were found in 38% of the dogs, even though most of them did

not have diarrhea.³

Dog parks can also be stressful for some dogs. Dogs who are shy, anxious or fearful may not do well in a dog-park setting. If your dog is aggressive, she also shouldn't be visiting a public dog park.

Caution must also be used when allowing small breed dogs to mingle with large dogs, as even rough play could lead to an injury. Some dog parks have separate locations for small dogs where they can play with other dogs their size, but the other issues still remain.

Private Dog Park Rentals Are Growing

Sniffspot allows dog owners to rent backyards and other private spaces across the U.S. so they can have a dog-park-like experience without the risks. CEO David Adams got the idea when his own dog, Soba, had a rough time at public parks. "Either there were dogs there that were bullying Soba, or it was dirty, or there was some kind of issue with crowding, or something else that made it an unpleasant experience," he told Cheddar News.⁴

While some dog owners dislike the idea of a private dog park because their dogs would miss socializing with other pups, a Sniffspot survey found 1 in 7 dogs have been attacked at a dog park.⁵ Adams suggests that the superior safety of a private rental outweighs the lack of socialization, which could be achieved via other means.

"It's a pretty uncertain environment to be at a city dog park. While I think that they're important for cities to offer free dog parks to people, I do think it's good to have an alternative like Sniffspot where the emphasis is on safety," he says.⁶

Options for Hiking, Water Spots, Agility and More

At Sniffspot, you can look for rentals that meet your dogs' needs in all 50 states. Spaces are available for your dog to have the time of her life, including:

- Water areas
- Hiking trails
- Fields
- Agility parks
- Beaches

You can also search by amenities offered at each site. Those for people, for instance, include rain shelter and shade from the sun, along with chairs, poop bags and trash cans available. For dogs, you can look for spaces that offer dog toys and agility equipment, or those that are small-dog friendly.

Safety aspects are also covered, such as fertilizer- and pesticide-free spaces. You can even choose from different venue options that offer:

- Scenic views
- Pasture

- Short grass
- Farm animal sightings
- Wild animal sightings
- Snow
- Turf

Prices vary by host, but typically range from \$8 to \$20 per dog, per hour. Sniffspot states that some hosts earn up to \$4,000 a month in passive income by renting out their land to pups looking to play safely.⁷

More Options for Doggy Playdates

If you like the idea of a private space for your pup — but also want the socialization aspect — you might consider setting up playdates for your dog. Ideally, you have friends and neighborhood dogs that match well with yours, and you can easily get the pups together for walks or playtime at a neutral location.

If not, there are apps available to set up dog playdates, so you can get together with other dogs of similar personalities (i.e., shy pups) and their owners in your community. This way, your social or reserved dog can interact with another pup of a similar temperament, but in a more controlled setting than a public dog park, and one you have control over. Other alternatives include taking your dog on a hike through a forest preserve or getting involved in agility training or canine nose work.

These options provide new sights, scents and sounds for your pup without exposing him to a potentially unsafe location. When you simply need to give your dog an hour to burn off some energy and enjoy being a dog, however, renting a private dog paradise near you may provide the perfect option.

Sources and References

¹ [Gitnux April 15, 2023](#)

² [J Environ Public Health. 2017;2017:5984086](#)

³ [J Vet Intern Med. 2016 Nov-Dec; 30\(6\): 1838–1845](#)

^{4,5,6,7} [Cheddar News May 2, 2023](#)
