

You May Completely Misread This Fun-Loving Message from Your Dog

Sometimes our dogs do things that we guess completely wrong. For example, many people take this to be a submissive behavior, when really your dog is inviting you (or another animal) to play and engage. Knowing this is sure to build a deeper bond between you.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Two canine behaviors people are often curious about are dropping to the ground when approached by another dog, and the dreaded digging
- If your dog drops to the ground when he sees another dog coming his way, he's using his canine communication skills to invite the other dog to play
- Digging is also a natural behavior for dogs, especially certain breeds. There are many ways to either curb the behavior or channel it more appropriately
- Dachshunds are notorious diggers, as are terrier breeds, especially Scotties and West Highland White Terriers
- Dogs that receive adequate daily physical activity are much less likely to develop undesirable habits out of boredom

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While cats are generally thought to be more mysterious and intriguing than their canine counterparts, your dog likely also behaves in ways that leave you scratching your head now and then. Two very common dog behavior questions people ask are:

1. Why does my dog drop to the ground when another dog (or human) approaches?
2. Why does my dog dig up my backyard? (And what can I do about it?)

Why Does My Dog Drop to the Ground When Another Dog Appears?

One interesting behavior many dogs perform that puzzles their humans is dropping to the ground when another dog approaches. People often think the posture is submissive, but that's not usually the case.

Assuming your dog hasn't been trained in the behavior (some dogs are), and as long as he isn't also growling or stalking the oncoming dog, it's probably an invitation to the other dog to play.

Your dog is inviting the approaching dog to engage with him. Dog-to-dog communication is all about body language, and the belly to the ground thing is one of several different canine play solicitations. Another is the play bow, where your dog's front end is on the ground and his back end is in the air.



Play Bow

Some dogs also do sort of a wave to an approaching dog by raising a front paw either from a standing position or a play bow. Dogs who extend themselves in this manner are generally considered to be well-balanced and friendly, however, if the oncoming dog doesn't understand the gesture, it can be a problem.

A dog who was removed too early from littermates and/or hasn't been well-socialized, including lots of interaction with other dogs, may have no idea what your dog is doing and could respond with fear or aggression.

A well-socialized dog, however, will respond appropriately by either accepting the invitation to play, or simply ignoring it if he doesn't feel like engaging.

Why Does My Dog Dig Up My Backyard?

Digging is another entirely natural canine behavior. Wild dogs dig holes to hide food. Females dig dens to deliver and nurse their pups. Humans have played a role in the behavior as well, by breeding "digger" dogs to hunt for vermin and other critters in earthen tunnels.

Dachshunds are notorious diggers, as are terrier breeds, especially Scotties and West Highland White Terriers. Their paws are even turned slightly outward so they can use them as little shovels. Other reasons dogs dig:

- **Boredom** — Many dogs left outside alone will dig just to entertain themselves.
- **Escape** — Some dogs will try to dig their way out of a fenced yard so they can have an adventure. For intact dogs, adventures often mean mating opportunities.
- **To find cooler ground** — If your dog is left outside in full sunshine or during the warmer months of the year, she may dig to find cooler layers of soil to rest on.
- **To bury things** — Some dogs just love to bury favorite toys, bones, treats or other food items.

Four tips for curbing digging behavior:

1. Insure your pet is well-exercised. Dogs that receive adequate daily physical activity are much less likely to develop undesirable habits out of boredom. A tired dog is a good dog.

2. Supervise him whenever he's out in your backyard. It's a really bad idea to put any dog outside, alone and unsupervised, for long periods. Dogs are social animals and need company.

If your dog is a digger, leaving him to his own devices outside is asking for a continuation of his excavation projects.

3. Consider using a deterrent in areas where your dog likes to dig, such as pepper, citrus or diluted ammonia. There are also commercial products available that leave a scent that is either unpleasant to animals or interferes with their sense of smell.

Sometimes putting your dog's own poop in his favorite hole will deter him from going back to that spot.

4. Give your dog an approved place to dig and train her to dig there, and only there, using positive reinforcement behavior training. Make sure the soil in her digging spot is soft, and bury a few treats. Give her a "dig" command, and praise her when she digs in the right spot.

If you catch her digging in another spot, tell her no and walk her over to her approved spot, give the "dig" command and praise her when she complies. An alternative to soft soil is sand, which is much easier to clean off than dirt.

Sources and References

[VetStreet July 22, 2013](#)

[Petcha.com](#)

[PetEducation.com \(Archived\)](#)
