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Digging Holes

Digging holes is a natural behavior for dogs and these sorts of behaviors are the hardest to stop. However, if a cause for the digging that is treatable can be identified, it may be able to help with the behavior, especially if it is related to separation anxiety.

There are probably a lot of possible causes for digging. They include wanting to escape the confines of the yard, trying to stay cool in the summer or warm in the winter, predation (if you have moles, for instance), separation anxiety, boredom, curiosity (digging at unfamiliar objects in the soil), aggression (wishing to dig out to reach an object of aggression) and displaced aggression (digging out of frustration at not being able to get to an object of aggression). My guess is that there are probably other causes, as well.

For aggression, using some sort of screening (vegetation, fence slats, etc.) to block the view of the world can be helpful. Separation anxiety can respond to behavioral therapy and can also respond, in some cases, to allowing access in and out of the house through a pet door. This might also help with boredom.

Medications may be helpful with separation anxiety and with aggression. Among the medications that might work, clomipramine (Clomicalm Rx), fluoxetine (Prozac Rx) and paroxetine (Praxil Rx) are probably the most likely ones to help but they do work best when used in concert with behavioral modifications.

In the case of puppies, vigorous exercise programs can sometimes make a huge difference in behaviors like this. It is hard to single out the puppy for exercise when there are multiple pets but it can make a big difference. It often takes more than an hour or two or really intense exercise per day to make a difference, though. This can be hard for people to arrange but it is something to think about.

There are veterinary behaviorists who can help evaluate why a behavior is occurring and then help with the treatment of the problem diagnosed. Unfortunately, there aren't a lot of board certified behaviorists in the country but it is worth a trip to one if the behaviors are making life miserable for you or for your dog.