



Johnson's Garden Talk

Lawn and garden information for the friends and customers of Johnson's Garden Centers

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Planning a Dog-Friendly Landscape

Jeremy Johnson, *Johnson's Nursery Buyer, Kansas Certified Nursery Professional*

I love my landscape. I love my dog. It is possible for both to live in harmony. Through proper planning and a little tolerance, you can enjoy a beautiful yard, complete with dogs.

There are a few things that need to be addressed up front when planning your landscape around dogs. First, dogs are territorial animals. This means that you will have paths around the perimeter of your yard. Dogs just like to patrol their area, and make sure that everything is OK. Secondly, dogs dig. They dig to find a cool spot to rest. They dig to bury bones. They dig to relieve stress or boredom. They dig because they like it. In fact, dogs are actually pretty good at digging. (Maybe a little help planting the garden this year???)

When planning your landscape, keep these two major factors in mind for planting success. The topic of dogs being territorial is a major issue in many dog-owner's yards. Very rarely have I seen a yard occupied by a dog over 20 lbs. that does not have a few run marks in it. It is next to impossible to plant grass and have your dog run back and forth on it, day in and day out, and have it survive. One way to combat this is to plant the entire length of your yard in shrubs, perennials and annuals. When you plant, make sure that you leave room for your dog to patrol the fence or perimeter of the property. This means leaving a minimum two feet between the mature size of the plant and your fence. This will allow Fido to feel comfortable while running up and down his fence.

On the topic of digging, negative reinforcement rarely works, because that is not how dogs learn. They learn by positive reinforcement. This means that you need to set aside an area of your yard where your dog is allowed and encouraged to dig. The area need not be huge, but big enough to satisfy their needs. To get started in an area, locate your spot and bury a few bones or toys in that area. Repeat this for a couple of weeks, and you should have a dog that knows right where to go for a little "me" time. One last tip—sandy soil cleans up much easier than clay, so you may want to incorporate sand in Fido's corner.

Now for the plant selections. Dogs like shade. Give them what they like. Trees and large shrubs are your dog's friend. One of my favorite dog-friendly shrubs is the Prague Viburnum. This plant will mature out to a large (10' x 10'), very attractive shrub. It has pink flowers in the spring, and glossy, deep green foliage through the summer. Another dog favorite is the Rose of Sharon. These plants, at 8-10' tall and 5-6' wide, will provide plenty of shade to lie under during the heat of summer while the flowers are a delight to look at from the human perspective.

There are many perennial choices available that are dog friendly. Moonbeam Coreopsis is a plant that is very drought tolerant and provides a spectacular show of yellow flowers all summer. Another great choice is Purple Coneflower. This Kansas native is extremely durable, taking any soil condition thrown at it, flowering from July through September.

Another great habit of dogs is lying around. They will lie down pretty much anywhere, which makes it a challenge to get things established sometimes. One thing that comes in handy to stop this behavior is the small fence or grow-through-type ring products we offer. These products will block your dog from being able to lay down on your newly planted shrubs and perennials.

One question that we often get is that of poisonous plants. The Humane Society of the United States has a comprehensive list on their web site if you are interested, but my general rule of thumb is to keep my dog from chewing on any plants planted in the landscape, thus eliminating potential problems. Providing other means of amusement (digging, toys, treats) should keep any potentially curious pets away from where they should not be, and help you avoid problems.

It really is fun and easy to have a dog-friendly and people-friendly landscape. If you have any questions, please send me an e-mail at jeremyj@johnsonsgarden.com. ■