

## Build Your Own Practice Earthdog Tunnel

**Test your dog's go-to-ground instincts in your own backyard.**

*Maryanne Dell*

Earthdog contests are used to determine the prey-drive, hunting and digging instincts of 25 breeds of dogs, including many terriers and dachshunds. (Visit <http://www.akc.org/events/earthdog/> for a list of eligible breeds.)

To make your own practice den liner, you'll need:

**Wood.** Sheets of plywood can be used for the top and sides of the tunnel. Although tunnels used for competition are between 10 and 30 feet long, your practice tunnel needn't be. Six or eight feet should be enough to teach your dog the ins and outs of "going to ground." To figure out how much plywood you'll need, determine how long you want to make the tunnel or each section of tunnel (if you want to include any 90-degree bends, which are required in the titling categories, Junior, Senior and Master earthdog), and get plywood that long. You'll need to cut the wood about 9.5 inches wide to allow for the regulation 9-inch opening, because the sides of the quarter-inch-wide plywood will be screwed into the top piece so that they are flush with its sides.

**Screws, bolts and metal hinges** to connect corner pieces. Screws should be a half-inch long to ensure that the plywood is held together solidly. Purchase enough screws to use one every foot to hold the top to the sides and to attach the dowels (see next item).

**Three wooden dowels** to separate the quarry from the dogs. Put a plywood floor on this section of the tunnel, and make the dowels nine inches long so they reach from top to bottom. They can be secured via screws to the top and bottom of the quarry compartment. A cage for the quarry with a handle that allows it to be easily removed from the den

**Quarry.** In trials or competitions, two rats are placed in one cage at the end of a tunnel. For practice, you can use bedding that has been used in a rat cage or other rat-scented objects.

Regardless of length and configuration, chutes have two sides and a top. Junior earthdog tests use straight, 30-foot-long liners, but you don't have to make a 30-foot tunnel in one piece. You can use several smaller pieces, joined with hinges, which can be taken apart for portability.

To create liners, cut equal lengths of 1-inch-thick wood, drill holes and screw a top piece onto two side pieces. To create the angled turns needed for senior- and master-level tunnels, you'll need to miter the corners. You'll also need to hinge pieces of wood together on top, making a trap door in the roof of the liner so the rats' cage can be removed.

Measure the plywood to the lengths you need and cut straight lengths. The top can then be attached to the tops of the side pieces by drilling holes at one-foot lengths and using screws. To make a trap door for the quarry cage that will go behind the dowels, cut a length of wood long enough to allow easy placement and removal of the cage. Attach a hinge to the top panel of the tunnel and to the trap door where they meet. A handle such as those used on kitchen drawers and cabinets on top of the door will allow easy access.

A tunnel that meets junior-level specifications will need an area at least 30 feet long.

You can leave the tunnel above ground if you want, but, earthdog tests take place underground, so if you want to plan yours there, you'll need to dig a ditch to accommodate it., or to If you'd prefer not to do that, plan on piling dirt, brush and other foliage on top of the tunnel, to approximate test conditions.

Of course, a straight tunnel of any length can be used to get your dog used to the experience, so if you don't have enough room for regulation size, you can at least create a practice venue.

More information is available on the American Kennel Club's website:  
[www.akc.org/events/earthdog/articles/building\\_den.cfm](http://www.akc.org/events/earthdog/articles/building_den.cfm)