

Keep Houdini at Home

Learn how to contain your dogs' knack for escaping.

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Posted: Sun Apr 23 00:00:00 PDT 2000

Sharon Belk-Krebs, a Bellingham, Washington, Ttouch practitioner and dog trainer, began installing electronic fences after it stopped her dogs' escapes.

She had fenced her back yard with conventional wire mesh that held her dogs for years. "Then the woman across the road started putting out food for feral cats," Krebs said. Once the dogs discovered that, there was no keeping them home."

Belk-Krebs' Cockers started climbing over the fence. She tried beefing up the mesh with a top strand of electric livestock fencing, but her wily spaniels defeated that as well. "When I saw one of them come close to being hit on the road, that did it - I knew I'd have to do whatever it took to keep them in," she said.

The underground electronic fence with receiver collars for her dogs was the answer for Belk-Krebs. "People have to educate their dogs about the fence," she said. "They have to work with, train and - most important - have a relationship with other dogs."

Some dog owners avoid electronic fences because the dogs is corrected with a shock. Belk-Krebs, too, is concerned that improperly used electronic fencing can be cruel. "If the people just let the dogs out there to figure it out for themselves, that's abusive," she said. "If you have a relationship with you dog and really educate it to completely avoid the shock, then it's okay. People need to genuinely love and respect the animal, and the dog has to genuinely trust them, or they may connect the shock to the owner and fear the owner."

Rebecca Chamberlain of Trainers Academy for Obedience and Behavioral Sciences, in Madison Heights, Michigan, urges owners to keep their dogs with them indoors and out. "They may escape or be stolen," she said. "Dogs left outside unattended are going to get into trouble. The message we give to owners is prevention, not allowing the dog the opportunity [to escape from the yard]."

Poet Robert Frost wrote: "Good fences make good neighbors." He may have written about ways people separate themselves from each other, but a good fence also keeps a dog out of mischief. At least indirectly, good fences also make good dogs.