

Keep Houdini at Home

Learn how to contain your dogs' knack for escaping.

September B. Morn

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

Arriving home, you drop the mail on the kitchen table, grab your dog's leash and head for the back yard. A walk in the park will be great. Except your dog has already decided to take a walk on its own - Rover's escaped.

Responsible dog owners struggle to keep their dogs safely at home. Tie-outs and chains can cause injury or death by strangulation and should be used only when you can watch your dog. A fence is safer, but some dogs still jump, dig, climb and chew their way out. What can keep a Houdini dog home?

Dogs escape because they're bored. It takes more than a good fence to hold a restless dog; it takes an interesting home life with outlets for mental and physical energy.

A dog needs something to do besides sleep all day. Chew toys are good, especially those that can be loaded with food for the dog to paw, roll and gnaw, trying to get to the tidbits. Keep the toy box interesting by rotating your dog-toy supply so different ones appear every few days.

Some dogs escape when they see excitement on the other side of the fence. If your yard abuts a playground, park or walking trail, your dog may stay home if you block its view.

Hormones are a major cause of escapes. When female dogs are in season, they release a scent that invites intact males to hop the fence. Get rid of the hormones by spaying or neutering pets not needed in well-planned breeding programs.

Lack of exercise also leads dogs to search for adventure. Young dogs especially need lots of exercise. To keep a dog happy and healthy, give it at least one of the following every day: two-hour walks; half- to one-hour run; half-hour game of fetch; one hour of play with another dog; half to one hour obedience, freestyle or other sports training.

The easiest and most popular escape is simply through an open gate. The most at-risk time is when several people pass through a gate and the last person isn't aware it should be shut. A sign on the fence, "Please Close Gate," may help, but a spring that pulls the gate shut automatically is best.

A securely closed gate is only one component of preventing escape. Owners also must create activities that harness the dog's energy.