

Dog Paths Prevent Trampled Yards

Designing a dog path can help prevent a trampled yard.

Cheryl S. Smith

When designing paths for your gardens, it pays to consult the dog. You might need to walk from the potting bench to the annuals garden, but your dog's route might be out the back door to the downwind corner of the yard to check out all the available smells. Placing plants across your dog's customary paths will likely result in trampled specimens and hard feelings.

Different breeds have different needs when it comes to where they will wander in your yard. The guarding breeds from the American Kennel Club's Working Group (Rottweilers, Doberman Pinschers, etc.) will want to patrol the perimeter, so it pays to leave space between your fence and beds. Herding breeds like to move in circles, so a sweeping circular path will suit their tendencies. Some dogs will gravitate to a high point in the yard for the best view of their surroundings, while others are drawn to low spots where moles may be burrowing.

Accommodating your dog doesn't have to disrupt your plans. You can either plant a garden that your dog can run through without causing damage — lavender works well in my part of the country and leaves the dog smelling good — or you can customize a path around the garden for your dog.

For more conventional paths — ones humans and canines can share — curve them gently to add visual appeal; just keep them direct enough to encourage use by your dog. Avoid sharp corners — your dog will likely cut the corners in favor of a faster route. If she seems to need a more firm reminder, install an edging or border along critical portions of the path. Garden-supply centers or catalogs offer a variety of decorative metal options that can add visual appeal while keeping your dog on the preferred route. If you choose a metal edging, avoid those with sharp edges that could injure paws.

You can construct the paths with almost any material, though some are more dog-friendly than others. One common choice is to simply leave the lawn in place between the garden beds. But even grass, the toughest of groundcovers, can't stand up to high-volume traffic. Your main task here will be to perform regular edging of these lawn paths to keep boundaries neat.

If you need something stronger than grass, consider mulch or some kind of hardscaping. Mulch includes materials such as wood chips. As long as your dog won't eat them, wood chips are an attractive choice, and often have a natural aroma that can help hide doggie odors and discourage a few bugs. The chips will gradually degrade, so you'll need to replace them every couple of years.

Hardscaping — cement or rock — offers permanence. Cement is easy to clean and can help wear down your dog's toenails. You can have it stained or impressed with a pattern — it doesn't have to be plain gray any more. Bricks can also add attractive patterns, in conjunction with concrete or on their own. Be sure to level them well in sand and fill in any spaces between them so there are no holes or uneven edges to catch a running dog's toes.

Rock can range from pebbles to massive flagstones, and add great texture to a landscape while standing up to high traffic. Larger stones provide a naturally cool surface for dogs in the heat of summer. Both large and small stones come in a variety of colors to complement any landscape.

Include your dog in your path design and you'll both be happier, and your garden will, too.

Cheryl S. Smith's book, *Dog Friendly Gardens, Garden Friendly Dogs* (Dogwise, 2003, \$19.95), focuses on combining dogs and gardens successfully. You can visit her website at www.writetdog.com.