

Planning a Garden with Dogs

Keep your dog's needs in mind as you plan your garden.

Cheryl S. Smith

Dogs and the great outdoors. Sounds like a natural fit, doesn't it? But sometimes dogs and the "small outdoors" — your yard — don't blend so easily. That's what this column is all about: How to have a happy, healthy dog and a flourishing landscape.

I'll admit at the outset that some situations simply won't work. Four large active dogs in a tiny fenced yard aren't going to let any grass grow under their feet. But a lawn is not the only option. Just as good dog trainers learn to think outside the box, gardeners who want dogs and beautiful landscapes can benefit from seeking fresh ideas.

You'll do well with one basic principle as your foundation — compromise. Planting your bed of prized perennials across the path your dog has worn almost guarantees conflict. Choose a less-traveled location to keep everyone happy.

A crucial aspect of compromise is safety. Sometimes in trying to keep the plants thriving, gardeners forget about potential hazards to their dogs. Putting down bone meal and metaldehyde-based snail bait in a garden that your dog has access to invites disaster. Fortunately, safer alternatives exist for nearly every traditional garden product. You just have to take the time to find and use them.

Realistic expectations are essential to success with dogs and gardens. You can't take a shade-loving hosta, plant it in full sun, and expect it to thrive any more than you can expect a Border Collie pup to be happy lounging on the couch all day.

Both dogs and gardens are living things, with needs that must be met.

In satisfying the needs of both, without damage to either, you will sometimes have to make adjustments to suit one or the other. Try to view these as opportunities to innovate, rather than annoyances. The solution may turn out to be better than what you originally had in mind.

Until planting time, peruse all those great plant catalogs that arrive all winter and start planning your own dog-friendly garden.

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 Web site at www.writedog.com.