

Plants for Yards with Dogs

Strong plants and flexible trees withstand canine activity.

Cheryl S. Smith

While you might want to place your most valued plants outside the easy reach of paws and jaws, practically the whole nursery is open to dog-owning gardeners. Choose wisely, and both your dog and your plants will thrive.

When it comes to shrubs and trees, bigger is better. A tree consisting of an upright trunk less than 1 inch thick, with a few spindly branches, will snap like a twig if treated roughly by Rover, and it just looks too much like a plain old stick. Buy the largest tree you can afford, with some good girth to the trunk. Yes, it's more expensive and more work to plant, but it's also instant gratification.

Weeping trees make a particularly good choice. Their hanging, limber branches just push aside when dogs run through them. You can find an incredible variety, both deciduous and evergreen. My own garden includes, among others, Young's weeping birch, a weeping cherry, and umbrella bamboo.

Visit a nursery on a windy day, and look for those plants that bend gracefully with the breeze. Many ornamental grasses fit this category, and they'll bow nicely out of a passing dog's way. They come in many colors and heights. You have probably seen pampas grass, but take a look at feather reed grass, switch grass, fountain grass, and others.

Groundcover requires a bit more investigation. Those rated to accept foot traffic are a good bet. I've found creeping jenny so tough, it's thriving in the dogs' potty area. Chamomile offers up a nice fragrance when walked upon, and there's a whole line of relatively tough groundcovers called "Step-ables."

Vines make another good choice. Planted close to their supports, they grow up and out of the dog's way. Many are heavily scented, in case you need a little sweetness to mask any doggie odors. Depending on your part of the country, you might choose clematis, honeysuckle, jasmine, or many others.

Perennials and annuals, usually used for garden color, can be more problematic. They're easily trampled or torn up. Plant them en masse to create a more solid appearance. Or plant them in pots and hanging baskets for out-of-reach color spots.

If you're a vegetable-growing enthusiast, your dog is best excluded from this garden. Otherwise, dogs learn to help themselves to the harvest. Avoid hard feelings — and possible digestive upsets — by fencing the veggie garden. You probably need to keep out other critters anyway.

With just a little extra time to consider your choices, you can fulfill your needs and your dog's, and enjoy a vibrant, thriving, dog-resistant garden come spring.

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.