

## America's Best Dog Parks of 2009

**These top dog parks make us want to get out and play.**

*By Maureen Kochan*

When we asked you to nominate your community's best dog park for our annual America's Best Dog Parks contest, we expected to hear about all the latest drool-worthy features like doggie showers, paddle pools, and agility equipment — and you didn't disappoint. But the most important feature all the top parks shared was a passionate group of dog lovers committed to giving dogs — and each other — the best possible place to spend time among friends.

The 2009 DOG FANCY America's Best Dog Park has that kindred community spirit in spades. As park user Lynn V. told us, "This park has been possible only through generous donations of time, money, and equipment — and a lot of blood, sweat, and tears."

If it takes a village to raise a child, it can also take one to build a dog park. Just ask the volunteers at DOG FANCY's top park for 2009 — Freedom Bark Park in Lowell, Ind.

The dog park's volunteers donated more than 2,700 hours of service to build the park, from farmers who tilled the land and planted grass seed to the high-school art teacher who painted the park's decorative fire hydrant.

"I would go to the roofing store in our town to buy shingles for our shelters, and the salesmen would offer to come after work to help roof the shelters," says Roberta T., president of the Freedom Bark Park Committee.

Building the park transformed this small community of 10,000, Roberta says. Before the park, dogs — even leashed — couldn't step paw in Lowell's public parks.

"This park was a major change for us, and our community really rallied behind it," Roberta says.

Rally they did — Freedom Bark Park was built entirely through donations. "We did not use tax money or ask for park money," Roberta says. "This dog park has truly been a labor of love."

The three-acre park (soon to add two additional acres) has much to admire, including a well with a solar-powered pump that supplies drinking water, recycled rubber mulch for walkways, weather shelters, tunnel, digging areas, shade trees, and biodegradable poop bags. Guests buy an annual membership (\$50 for residents; \$60 for nonresidents) and must show proof of vaccinations.

More than 450 people — most of them with dogs in tow — celebrated the park's October 2008 grand opening.

"Our dogs are truly accepted and loved here now," Roberta says.

The runners-up

**Best Place to Spend the Day**

**Dog Wood Dog Park**  
Jacksonville, Fla.

Take the kids to Disney World — take the pooches to Dog Wood Dog Park! It features a swimming pond, woods, and fun classes on sports like flyball, obedience, and agility. Monthly passes are \$35; day passes (Saturday and Sunday only) are \$11.

**Best Classes**

**Howard and Erna Soldan Dog Park**  
Lansing, Mich.

Before the 15-plus acre Howard and Erna Soldan Dog Park opened in 2007, the park's community association held workshops to coach people about dog-park safety and etiquette. The public park's educational mission carries on through regular classes on topics like canine body language and dog nutrition. Smart!

**Coollest Pool**  
Millie Bush Bark Park  
Houston

When temperatures in Houston soar past 80 degrees and humidity levels climb just as high, there's no better place to beat the heat than Millie Bush Bark Park. The 13-acre public park includes doggie pools and fountains, special doggie showers, and lots of places to escape the sun. Now that's cool.

**Best Setting**  
Dogwood Park at Victor Ashe Park  
Knoxville, Tenn.

Victor Ashe Park has a little something for everyone: a disc golf course, four large soccer fields, a cross-country trail, playground, fishing, and now Knoxville's very first dog park: Dogwood Park. The park boasts plenty of wag-worthy features, including tunnels, ramps, and doggie water fountains, all free to area residents.

**Best Community Outreach**  
Shaggy Pines Dog Park  
Ada, Mich.

This dog park, with its 15 fenced acres of woods and trails, knows how to treat guests — and the community. Park owners organize special play days for area foster dogs, raise money for local animal charities, and have sent care packages to K9 units in Afghanistan and Iraq. Memberships start at \$22 a month (one-day passes are available on Sundays).

**Best Pay-Per-Play**  
Jackson's Howlabaloo Dog Park  
Edinboro, Pa.

Jackson's Howlabaloo Dog Park has everything a dog (and dog lover) dreams of: 58 fenced acres of bucolic hills, trails, streams, and woods. Water-loving pooches also get their pick of five ponds. This paradise isn't free; however, day passes go for \$9 per dog; \$3 for each additional pooch.

**Best Exercise Area**  
Happy Tails Dog Park  
Dunedin, Fla.

No wonder this place is called Happy Tails. Dogs get to romp through tunnels, scramble up an A-frame, and sail through jumps under plenty of shade trees, then cool (and clean) off with a quick shower. Best of all, it's free.

**Most Determined Volunteers**  
Cheyenne Park Off-Leash Area  
Ely, Iowa

When the area around Cedar Rapids flooded last year, the waters swept away homes, businesses, and much of Cheyenne Park Off-Leash Area — once Iowa's largest fenced dog park. But the waters couldn't dampen park supporters' spirits. They rallied to reopen a small section of the public park (a monumental task, says park user Maria A.), and vow to one day restore the spot to its former splendor.

**Best Community Activities**  
Ossining Dog Park  
Ossining, N.Y.

They know how to have fun at Ossining Dog Park. This dog park's popular events include Bark in the Park, a festival that features vendors, dog demos, and games; a Halloween costume parade; and a humans-only gathering unapologetically dubbed "Unleashed."

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