



# The Underdog Training "So Your Dog" Series, Topic Three

## So Your Dog- Is Destructive

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Chewed Electrical cords? Missing socks? Garden and lawn excavations? Does this sound familiar! Does your dog redecorate your house and garden? While some dogs are naturally more destructive than others, there are ways to reduce your dog's destructive tendencies and at the same time, improve your relationship with your dog. There are a number of reasons why your dog may be destroying things. Identifying this reason is a vital part of resolving the problems you experience.

### Why is my dog destructive?

- Lack of exercise. Many dogs that are destructive simply do not receive enough physical exercise.
- Lack of mental stimulation and training
- Anxiety and Separation Related Behaviour
- Boredom and lack of environmental enrichment
- Learned behaviour- each time the dog destroys something and enjoys doing so, it reinforces the behaviour
- Access is given to irresistible items!
- Weather changes and lack of sleeping areas- In Summer many dogs dig holes to find a cooler spot to sleep while in Winter or after rain, many dogs will dig as a result of the changing smell of the soil/ lawn.

### How to Reduce your dogs Destruction!

- **When does your dog** become destructive? If the behaviour only occurs in your absence and the measures below do not improve the situation, your dog may be suffering from separation anxiety. If you believe this to be the case, please contact us and we can recommend the best professional for your situation.
- **Limit access!** This is particularly important with young dogs and puppies. When leaving your dog in an area, ensure there is nothing within reach that they could take or destroy.
- **Increase your dog's physical exercise.** Regardless of the cause of your dog's destructive behaviour, an increase in exercise is likely to be helpful. Try to provide further physical exercise by playing active games with your dog at home such as tug of war (with an appropriate toy) as well as increasing the duration and intensity of your dogs walks. If you lack the time to increase your dogs exercise, consider employing a walker to provide further exercise to your dog while you are at work. Breaking up your dog's day can be crucial- particularly for those full time workers with a solo dog.
- **Train your dog!** Going to obedience classes, taking up agility or teaching tricks at home will help to work your dog's brain. This is just as important as the provision of physical exercise and has the added advantage that you can always make the exercise more difficult without requiring additional time. Physical exercise does not have this advantage as it needs to increase in duration or intensity as the dog's fitness increases- if we were to rely on it alone to improve our dog's behaviour. Training should be ongoing for your dog- if they already know the basics; working on more advanced skills will not only help to stimulate them but will also improve your bond and relationship.
- **Vary your routine.** While we are often limited because of work and other commitments, varying your routine can assist dogs that anticipate particular events. When a dog anticipates and expects certain things to occur and they do not, they can become anxious and this can lead to destructive behaviour. By varying the routine, the dog does not develop these firm expectancies and is less likely to experience increasing anxiety. Try to walk and feed your dog at different times, vary when the dog is inside and outside etc.
- **What does your dog have to stimulate them** when they are in their backyard? While many dogs have toys, few dogs have toys that interact with them without a person's presence. Gather up all of your dog's toys and divide them into 2 or 3 groups- start rotating these groups every few days so that your dog regularly has a collection of 'new' toys to play with. In addition, you may want to consider purchasing some interactive treat balls, nylabones and hanging toys that can hold your dog's interest even when you're not there to play. Reduce your dog's meals so that you can use their treat balls to feed them. Treat balls provide both mental and physical stimulation as your dog works hard to access the food inside. Does your dog enjoy safe rawhide chews, pigs ears or greenies chews? Try to find treats that will last your dog a number of hours rather than those that are eaten quickly- this may take some experimenting.
- **Provide a digging area-** If your dog enjoys digging, set up an area with clean sand where toys and treats are semi buried. This will encourage your dog to fulfil their need to dig in an appropriate area. You may also wish to safely peg plastic mesh flat over your garden beds- with holes cut for your plants- to discourage digging in garden areas. Consider what your dog is bred for- many terriers will dig instinctually- rather than getting frustrated, accept that this is and will continue to be a part of them and you can direct it to an appropriate area.
- **Does your dog steal?** If your dog regularly takes inappropriate items when you are present he may be doing this as a way to get your attention. DON'T chase your dog when they do this- this creates a rewarding game that your dog will want to play regularly!! Instead teach your dog to approach you with something in their mouth- gently remove the item by squeezing either side of your dogs mouth until they relinquish the item 20-30 seconds later- redirect the dog to an item that they are allowed to chew and play with. If you need your dog to drop something urgently, rather than approach them, turn away from them and with or without an item to focus on, pretend you are having the most fantastic time- plenty of noise and movement is likely to get your dog to drop the object and come over to see what on earth you're so excited about! If you catch your dog AS they are trying to steal something, you need to quickly intervene- preventing the dog from picking up the item (grabbing a collar or a quick clap of the hands works for many dogs in this instance) and 20-30 seconds later, redirect the dog to an appropriate toy.
- **Provide appropriate shelter** and cool places to lie in Summer for your dog. Touch the areas where you think your dog will lie- if the surfaces are too hot for you to comfortably touch- they will be too hot for your dog to lay for more than a few moments!

**The information provided in the So Your Dog Series is general in nature. We recommend seeing a qualified dog trainer and having a veterinary examination completed for the best results in resolving your dogs problems.**

**For further information or training options, go to [www.underdogtraining.com.au](http://www.underdogtraining.com.au)**