

CANINE CORNER

by Kathleen Crisley, CSMT, CTMT, SCMT

www.balanceddog.co.nz / www.doggymom.com

Dog-friendly gardening

This issue is landing in your letterbox during the depth of winter but, as many gardeners know, spring will be here soon so it's the ideal time to plan the garden before spring has sprung.

Many of us have experienced gardening disasters when our dogs and our gardens haven't been a good match. With a little bit of planning, however, your garden can be both dog-proof and dog-friendly.

Dogs enjoy digging, which can signal the death knell to beloved seedlings and plants. Dogs dig in warm weather to lie in cooler soils on hot days, some will do it for enjoyment, and others as an expression of anxiety. Digging is a natural behaviour and, for the garden to survive throughout the growing season, I recommend fencing and barriers. It's also useful to set aside a part of the garden which will not be planted and, instead, will be your dog's designated digging spot. Some owners fill this area with sand similar to the way you would fill a sand box for children.

Another option to separate dogs from plants is to use raised beds (see right). Raised beds offer the additional advantage of making harvesting easier — there is less pressure on your knees and back.

Dogs have a keen sense of smell: blood and bone fertilisers and some compost mixtures will be very tempting to dig in and eat. A good layer of seaweed, dug in well, is nourishing to the garden and, while some dogs may enjoy the smell, they are much less likely to indulge in eating it in large amounts. If you dig in seaweed early in the spring, rain will help wash some of the smell away before your dog spends lots of time in the garden. If using compost, dig it in well and fence off the garden for a few days until the odour reduces, making it less interesting to your dog.



Speaking of compost, ingestion of corn cobs and other items from compost heaps can cause gastric upsets or, worse, obstructions which require surgery. I recommend buying a compost tumbler (bottom left) which keeps the material enclosed and away from your dog. Tumblers make your compost very easy to turn, too.



A product that must also be avoided is cocoa mulch, which appears each year on Trade Me and in some specialist garden centres. Although it smells divine, like a cup of hot cocoa in the garden, it's toxic to your dog.

A garden with a tree or two is always welcome on a hot day for the shade they provide.

Remember to read the labels on all products you intend to use in your garden to ensure they are dog-friendly. Pay attention to recommended withholding periods when your dog should not have access to the area that has been treated; this is common for many lawn chemicals, for example.

And check that your garden shed is secure and ready for use because all materials and tools should be stored out of reach of your dog to keep them safe from harm. 🐾