

TREVOR COCHRANE
the garden guru

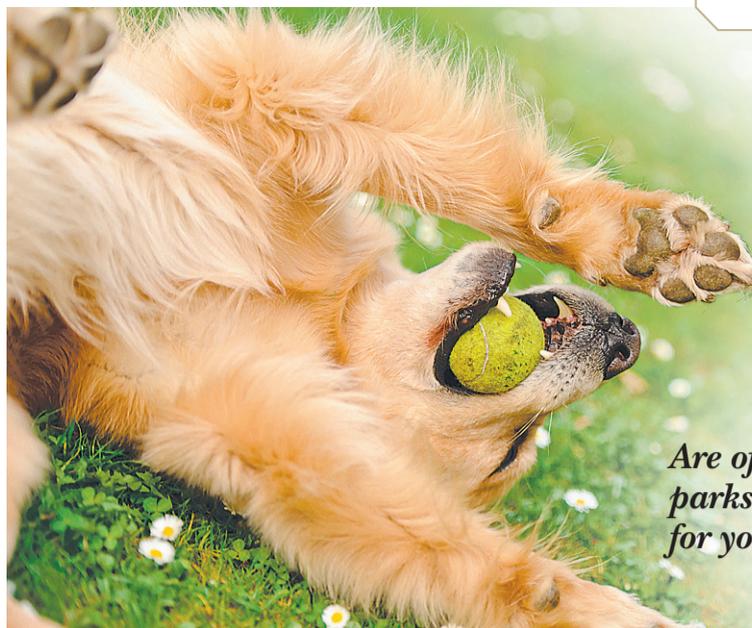


perth's DOG whisperer

KATHY KOPELLIS
MCLEOD



The respected WA dog behaviour consultant helps us understand our canine companions



Picture: iStockphoto.com/cumfek

Are off-lead dog parks good or bad for your dog?

Q&A

Q Teresa Riney, of Ocean Reef, transplanted three seven-year-old olive trees. One has taken well while the other two are unhappy.

A Not that long ago I was in Ireland at a garden show called Bloom where the designers used 500-year-old olive trees that had been dug out of the ground in Spain and shipped to Ireland before being placed in giant containers for exhibition in a Mediterranean-style garden in the show. The trick with any transplant is offsetting the root damage done by making sure the roots that survived the transplant have ample moisture and light nutrients to sustain the tree. The trees in this instance will recover slowly, but adding an occasional drench with Seasol, which stimulates new root growth, and some PowerFeed sprayed over the emerging foliage will help the tree no end.

Q Ray Stapledon, via email, has a nectarine tree that failed last year and he wants to know what to do to get a crop this year.

A Ray, don't do anything. Particularly do not feed the tree when it's in flower. The tree will set fruit naturally and doesn't need any care until you've picked your crop. Then, giving it a feed with a complete fertiliser would be a good idea.

Trevor Cochrane

The Garden Guru to the rescue

For your chance to get the benefit of gardening advice from Trevor Cochrane, tell us in 100 words or less about your garden and its problems. Send an email to housecalls@sundaytimes.newsld.com.au or write to **The Sunday Times, HOME Editor, GPO Box D174, Perth, WA 6840**. Include your full name and address and a daytime phone number. Please do not send any soil samples or plant cuttings.

* All readers whose gardening questions are published win a Tempest Deluxe 9 Pattern Nozzle Gun, valued at \$5.95, and a copy of The West Australian Garden Guide by Neville Passmore and Trevor Cochrane, valued at \$39.95.



VISITING dog parks can be an enjoyable part of dog ownership. The parks offer the opportunity for regular exercise, socialisation and a convenient outlet for your dog to expend excess energy. But for some dog owners they may not be the wisest choice.

A dog park is a community resource, shared by dog owners and non-dog owners alike. The park's popularity and safety require that users are sensitive to the rights of others and behave in respectful ways.

Dog parks may, or may not, be a good option for your pet. They could be doing your dog more harm than good. Here are some pros and cons to consider.

SOCIALISATION

The parks allow ample opportunities for dogs to interact with a diverse range of people, as well as other dogs. This helps to increase confidence, social skills and enhances a dog's ability to cope with new stimuli.

On the other hand, dogs that frequent the same park regularly often become territorial towards other dogs that aren't part of their regular social group. They can become aggressive in guarding what they consider to be their turf and they can also harass passers-by.

Moreover, because it is a handy outlet, some dog owners abandon efforts to control or interact with their dog. They make little effort to monitor their pets; instead they allow a pack mentality to develop among the animals.

REACTIVE DOGS

If your dog has restrained manners and isn't keen on other dogs bounding up to their face to say "Hi", a busy dog park could prove problematic.

Dogs not under their owners' control can be stressful and annoying to others. Their unwelcome approaches may result in dog fights and arguments between owners that could easily have been prevented.

Rude behaviour by dogs takes many forms. Regardless of how friendly a dog may be, a dog repeatedly invading another dog's space can lead to problems for everyone concerned. Dogs will aggressively defend against unwanted advances.

ANTI-SOCIAL DOGS

Bringing a dog with aggression issues or wild and unruly behaviour to an off-lead dog park is not a sensible step. Often dogs with bully tendencies have a rambunctious play style. This, in combination with their lack of self-control and sociability, can scare the shy and cautious individuals and/or lead to an attack with their menacing behaviour.

Dogs have different play styles, but even a robust dog will find such an invasion intimidating. More often than not, this leads to conflict in the park. If your dog has a history of fights, regardless of its size, it's a bad idea to bring it to the dog park. Instead, seek professional help or find a suitable outlet where your dog won't put others at risk.

DOGS RUNNING AMOK

Be aware that dog parks are people parks, too. They are often frequented by young families and the elderly. It may be hard for dog owners to believe, but mothers with babies in prams and toddlers do not always welcome unruly, undisciplined dogs bounding up to them.

Imagine young children running amok in public, being allowed to clasp the legs of passers-by, while their parents call out, "He's friendly – he just wants to say hi!"

There's no reason to tolerate such behaviour in children. It should not be acceptable for dogs that are not under their owners' control.

RUDE PEOPLE

Many owners of "rude and invasive" dogs do not perceive their dog's actions in that light. They don't see a problem and are even perplexed that others don't welcome their dog's approach.

People have a right to their personal space. They have valid reasons when they ask you to control your dog. It is incumbent on owners to do so. As a general rule, dogs don't like other dogs in their face and space. A dog that feels under attack becomes defensive. It doesn't want to be chased or to interact with strange dogs.

People can feel the same way and be scared of unfamiliar dogs or they may simply just want to enjoy a stress-free walk with their dog.

Sadly, when people are asked to call their dog, the response is sometimes unfavourable. It is essential to be responsive to the needs of others and be on the alert to diffuse any problem before it escalates into an unpleasant incident.

LACK OF SUPERVISION

Problems arise when people, absorbed in conversation with other park users, pay scant attention to what their dog is up to. Your dog should be priority No. 1. You should always know where it is and what it's doing.

Turning a blind eye when your dog goes to the toilet is not how responsible dog owners behave.

UNSUPERVISED CHILDREN

Young children often scare or attract a dog's attention by shouting at them and running away, like prey. The size, quick movements and sporadic actions of small children can trigger a chase response in dogs. This may cause otherwise calm dogs with good temperaments to chase and even nip or bite a child. When small children and dogs share parks, everyone concerned should be keeping a vigilant watch.

Responsible dog owners recognise potential problems. They're aware of the precursor signs that indicate an impending incident and are generally switched on with what is occurring. Parks where dogs are allowed are not the real problem. It is more the dogs' owners that contribute to dog park problems. Their abrogation of responsibility, lack of control and lax supervision combined with untrained dogs make for a problematic mix.

* Check out Kathy's website at www.kathydogtraining.com.au for her 2012 Intensive Workshop dates and other seminar announcements.