

TREVOR COCHRANE
the garden guru



Q&A

Q Nola Costa, of Mirrabooka, says she has the biggest crop of mangoes ever, but the fruits are small and she wants to know how to make them bigger.

A The answer is you have to sacrifice some fruit to allow the others to get bigger. Of the 175 you had on the tree this year, removing 75 would have ensured the rest were bigger. That said, mangoes tend to naturally drop small fruit during dry conditions so picking the fruit off is a little difficult. As the tree matures, you will get bigger fruit naturally and my suggestion is you accept the little ones alongside the bigger ones because they all taste the same – delicious!

Q Anita Liyanage, of Henley Brook, has a serious ant problem that is impacting her gazanias. On close inspection, the soil is alive with them.

A Grab a bottle of Amdro – a specialised ant bait that seems effective against most invasive ant species. Always check the label and apply sensibly, but it will control the ants you're describing.
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.newsltd.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 Hortex Teflon Coated Pruner, valued at \$13.95.



Michele Franzinelli in Jetto's Patch in Maida Vale.
Pictures: Richard Polden



perth's DOG whisperer

KATHY KOPELLIS McLEOD



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

Picture: Alex Cearns, Houndstooth Studio, houndstoothstudio.com.au



There are dogs whose bite is worse than their bark, but teaching your pet "bite inhibition" will be a good way to control the pressure it exerts

PUPPIES and some older dogs are unaware of the strength of their bite. They do not come hard-wired with the knowledge that biting can cause pain. They need to learn to use their mouths, to interact with us – and other dogs – without inflicting pain.

"Bite inhibition" is how they learn to moderate their bite strength. Pups have very sharp teeth, but a weak jaw. Like human babies, they will teethe. This can cause discomfort when they're mouthing or biting you.

The teeth of adult dogs are not as sharp, but they develop powerful jaws that can cause considerable damage if they bite.

There are ways to teach bite inhibition to your puppy.

Here are some of the tools that can help train your pet to moderate its bite pressure:

YOU HURT ME, I STARTLE YOU

Promptly yell "Ouch!" after an unacceptable bite. Most pups will back off, at least for a few moments. Sound like you're serious, but bear in mind that the aim is to interrupt bad behaviour, not give the pup a cardiac arrest. Then recommence interacting with your puppy, telling it, "Be gentle".

If it continues to use inappropriate bite strength, say, "Ah-Ah", firmly, followed by, "Be gentle". This reminds the pup that you're monitoring its biting – teaching it that humans are more sensitive than other pups, and that it really hurts us when they bite.

YOU BITE ME, I'M OUT OF HERE

If you have said "Ouch!" and reminded your pup to be gentle in a convincingly assertive tone but it still mouths with more force than is acceptable, immediately remove yourself from its presence. The message here is play nice or play alone.

When you return to engage with your puppy once more, be calm. Take note of and praise good behaviour, but make it aware of any misbehaviour.

SUPPORT PUPPY GENTLY AND FIRMLY

The "Ouch!" method usually works well with most puppies. Over time it should result in gentler mouthing. However, occasionally, it can have the opposite effect, with some pups actually increasing their bite fest.

If you have one of the more determined puppies, refrain from using this technique. Instead, hold your puppy securely upright, taking care to avoid its teeth and wait until it has finished with the temper tantrum.

Keep quiet, calm and relaxed. This isn't an exercise to punish your pup, but one to settle it down in a humane way. Gently and slowly release once it has stopped wriggling.

MAKE BETTER CHOICES

Divert your pup's attention by giving it something else to do. Ask it to "sit" and calmly reinforce the good behaviour. Give the pup more attention when it behaves well, instead of focusing too much on the biting misbehaviour.

SATISFY YOUR PUPPY'S URGE TO CHEW

Give your pup something appropriate to chew on. Offer a teething puppy a chew toy, instead of your hand. Puppies need safe outlets to satisfy their chewing instinct. Any toy that keeps their attention while they're in "chew mode" will reduce the amount of negative encounters.

ALLOW YOUR PUPPY TO MOUTH YOU

Mouth contact does not have to be avoided. Some gentle gumming of your hand can be permitted. However, if the pup begins to lose self-control, take appropriate action. Interrupt it or remove yourself.

Teaching a pup what is an acceptable amount of tooth pressure is important. Judge the strength of each bite and determine what is an acceptable level. Praise your pup when it displays good self-control. Be proactive and disengage when your puppy bites too hard.

AVOID REACTING BADLY

Provide your puppy with productive feedback. This does not include holding their mouth shut, scolding, scruffing, turning them on their back and growling at them. Nor does it include pointing your finger at them while growling "No!".

Do not engage in any behaviour that could compromise your bond with your pet and provoke more undesirable behaviour. Inappropriate reactions can be interpreted as a licence to continue. It can make them defensive and quite often increase the biting.

Realise that some puppies are sensitive and easily intimidated by threatening behaviour. Ease up – you don't do any favours by frightening it.

TUG GAMES

Dogs need outlets for some of their normal drives. We enjoy playing a game of tug, just as our dogs do. It works as an outlet for normal dog behaviour.

Play tug with your puppy, but add some important rules. It needs to learn to restrain itself to acceptable human levels. Any breach of this rule, or any escalation in excitability stops the game.

Recommence once composure has been re-established. But don't fail to communicate that you've been hurt when your pet bites you, albeit unintentionally.

Bite inhibition training isn't a guarantee that your dog will never bite. In case of a backslide, a dog that has learnt some self-control doesn't do as much damage as one that doesn't know how to use their jaws.

Given the right – or wrong – circumstances, any dog can bite. Nevertheless, teaching bite inhibition is a step in the right direction.

* Check out Kathy's website at www.kathysdogtraining.com.au for her popular Intensive Workshop dates and other dog-related information.