

# PLANT WITH A PET IN MIND

*You can own a dog and still have a great-looking backyard if you take some simple steps to protect your garden and provide a safe haven for your pet*

**A**BOUT 35 per cent of Australian households own at least one dog and although this number has reduced slightly in the past few years, we remain a nation of dog lovers.

Most dog lovers have a garden and have struggled at times to have a great garden as well as a happy healthy pet. It is possible to have both – all it takes is a few simple design tips that are easy to implement in established gardens as well as in the planning stage of new gardens.

Gardening with a puppy is the most difficult time. As considered as the decision is when selecting a new dog, nothing can prepare you for the onslaught of reticulation pieces appearing at the back door, your favourite plants delivered to you in pieces, and potting mix strewn all over the paving.

Caring for a new puppy can be a gardener's worst nightmare. By the time the puppy has matured and is happy to laze under a cool tree, the backyard is often a shadow of its former glory. But don't let this be a deterrent, the emotional and physical benefits of owning a dog far outweigh the negatives.

Take a look around the backyard and begin to create some pet-friendly features, make it an enjoyable space for the whole family – including the dog.

## STOP DIGGING

Dogs that dig are often looking for a cool place to lie in the heat of summer. Select a cool protected area, either under a tree or on a shady side of a building, and create a sandbox. The

size of the box depends on the size of the dog. An area at least 1.5m x 1.5m is enough space for an average-sized dog to dig.

Fill the box with washed white sand to about 30cm deep. Keep this area damp and in summer hose it down. The wet sand is cool on the dog's belly and soon it will become a favourite spot to rest, even on the hottest day.

## KEEP OFF GARDEN BEDS

If dogs are continually trampling on garden beds, because they are running up and down the fence, avoid planting up against the fence and create a tunnel for them to use between the foliage and the fence. In established gardens a quick low trim of shrubs is a solution to avoid damaged plants.

## CHOOSE SOFT PLANTS

When selecting varieties, avoid soft, brittle stems and choose those varieties of plants that are flexible. Do a test at the garden centre by checking the resilience of the foliage, gently checking how far it will bend down. If there is no resistance and it springs back easily, it passes the test. Many of the strappy-leaf plants are perfect for those gardens that are home to active dogs.

## OUT OF BOUNDS

Mass-plant varieties close together and as they grow they will create a visual barrier that most dogs will walk around rather than jumping over. Carefully selected groundcovers will also be avoided.

If there is an area where the dog is out of

## TIPS FOR DOG-FRIENDLY DESIGN

- \* Bury the reticulation system under mulch. Dripper irrigation placed under mulch is not only water efficient, but will not be noticed by the dog. As the old adage goes: out of sight, out of mind.

- \* Keep an extra large water bowl filled to the brim in a shady spot. A large clay bowl with the holes plugged with silicone is an extremely effective way of keeping drinking water cool in summer.

- \* An area of lawn is cool in summer and a favourite place for dogs to lie. Ensure the lawn is thick and healthy. Regularly use a fertiliser that encourages and strengthens root systems of lawn varieties. A strong healthy lawn will successfully stand up to wear and tear and continual traffic.

- \* A bored dog will go looking for reticulation parts to chew on and pot plants to tip over. Anchor pots to the ground and

pot up all small plastic pots to larger ones.

- \* Mulch pots with stones, so the soil can't be scooped out. The stones need to be heavy enough so it's difficult for them to be moved with a paw.

- \* If there is an area in the sun and warm on the coolest day in winter, reserve this for the dog's winter sleeping area. Cover it with chunky mulch and put up a sign saying: "Keep out. Rex lives here in winter!"

bounds, a slightly prickly variety is a further deterrent.

Using river stones up to 15cm in diameter on garden beds as mulch is a deterrent to keeping them off these beds. When laid, these stones tend to feel a little unstable underfoot for dogs and in most cases the dogs will walk around rather than try to negotiate uneven terrain. Once again the size of the stones will depend a little on the size of the dog.

## VIEWPOINT

Create a special area from where the dog can oversee the backyard. They love scoping their territory and if they can view the whole yard from this vantage point, it reduces the need to go to every corner of the garden.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Dogbane is a fleshy-leaved, low-growing plant that's sun-hardy and waterwise. Most dogs avoid it because of the pungent foliage. Plant it in areas to discourage dogs, or make a spray from the foliage and apply it where you don't want the dogs to go.

## FLEA-REPELLENT PLANTS

Lavender, pennyroyal, rosemary, wormwood and sage all have strongly scented foliage that will repel insects, including fleas.

SUE McDOUGALL



Sky and Shadow relax in the garden.

## PERTH'S DOG WHISPERER

# SAFE WAY TO LOSE FEAR

*A childhood fear of dogs can be triggered by a variety of causes, but the good news is that it can be overcome*

**T**HERE is a fear of dogs and then there is cynophobia. Where most people fear a snarling dog, those with a real fear will be terrified of even a very friendly, small-breed puppy. Seeing a dog on television or hearing a dog in the distance is cause enough for some to panic.

As persistent and upsetting this problem is, the good news is that it can be overcome through a very careful, gradual introduction to dogs.

Fear of dogs can be triggered by a

variety of causes. These include being knocked over, barked at or bitten by a dog, seeing a parent behaving fearfully, and being alarmed by scary media footage or dogs that are portrayed in vicious ways in movies.

Where one child may bounce back from a dog bite and still enjoy dogs, another may develop a strong fear even by a little breed excitedly jumping up at them.

Begin with something very safe from your child's perspective. Maybe something like a stuffed dog, where

positive associations are formed in its presence.

## Here are some more tips:

### READ A BOOK

Find your child a picture book with bright and colourful illustrations that draw them to the book. If the storyline is engaging, the characters believable and the ending is satisfying, a good book is effective on many different levels. In addition to addressing fear and dealing with courage, it can stimulate discussions on dogs and offer safe advice on how to approach unfamiliar dogs.

### PHOTOS

Share happy photos of family and friends with their dogs. Talk about the dog in the picture, how friendly and gentle it was, pointing out all the fun things you got up to with it. Reminisce about happy times with your family dog and how good having a dog in your life made you feel.

### DESENSITISATION

Gradually expose your child to dogs – initially in a very low-threat situation, as mentioned above. As well as viewing good-natured dogs on television, gently increase exposure to the real thing.

Avoid moving faster than your child is able to. The aim is that over time a tolerance to closer contact with dogs will happen. This can take a long time for some individuals. Be patient and resist the temptation to rush.

### OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

When you're away from home, make an effort to comment about dogs you notice at a distance that doesn't stress your child. Point out the dogs that are interacting in a fun way with other children and adults.

Keep your manner upbeat, particularly if a dog is being vocal. Explain to your child that's how dogs



*KATHY KOPELLIS McLEOD The dog behaviour consultant helps us understand our canine companions*