



The outdoor dog has a place to live, not a home

It never ceases to amaze me why people want a dog and then sentence it to a lifetime of social isolation, banished to the backyard without little or no human attention for the rest of its life. I often receive telephone calls from clients wanting advice on what to do with their dog that is:

- a) Barking all day and night
- b) Escaping regularly
- c) Destroying the yard
- d) Threatening people at the fence
- e) Digging etc



When I question these people about the dog's living conditions I often find that they have a high energy breed (Border Collie, Beagle, Staffy, German Shepherd etc) and that it spends its entire life relegated to the backyard with little or no human company on a daily basis. Further questioning reveals that the dog gets a 20 minute walk two or three times a week (because the owners 'Don't have time') - which equates to NO exercise.

What did they expect would happen???..... *Sigh*

The only thing these dogs have to look forward to is their daily meal and even this is usually over within 3.4 seconds....then what?

Many people justify why their dogs live outdoors with excuses such as:

He's not housetrained

All dogs can be housetrained with a little effort and management. Consider installing a doggie door to allow your dog access to outdoors when he needs it.

He acts like an idiot indoors

He's probably so excited at being with humans that he cannot contain himself. Dogs need to be trained in how to behave appropriately indoors.

He needs the fresh air

He'll get all the fresh air he needs if you walk and/or exercise him daily. This is your responsibility as a dog owner. Solitary confinement in the backyard is not good for a dog.

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I'm allergic to dog hair

Then why on earth did you get a dog? If you answer because you truly love dogs, then keeping one in social isolation just because you're allergic to their hair is cruel. Besides pet hair is not a known allergen, dander (skin flakes) and saliva are normally the culprits.

He drops too much hair

Bathe your dog weekly and brush him daily. This will keep shedding to a minimum. Besides, dogs bring us so much pleasure on a daily basis that vacuuming regularly is a small price to pay.

He chews things indoors

This is the result of a dog that has not been trained on how to behave indoors. Some training and management are the keys here.

But I have two dogs

Then you have TWO unhappy, bored, lonely and stressed dogs that are more closely bonded to their dog companion than their human companions. These dogs still need to spend time with the rest of the pack. Dogs want YOUR company. Besides, in my experience two dogs are even LESS likely to receive regular exercise and attention. Owners can easily justify to themselves that they have 'each other' for company. What then is the point of having a dog?

We got him to protect us

Then wouldn't he be better off indoors where you and your possessions actually are? It's easy to poison, immobilise or set free and outdoor dog. Criminals then have free access to you and your possessions. Your dog cannot protect you if he's been baited, killed or set free. Dogs protect their territory which in the case of the outdoor dog is normally the BACKYARD; which is great if you're worried about your plants being stolen.

Dogs 'should' live outside

Really? Why? If you truly believe this, question your value system. If you believe that they're messy and dirty and should therefore live outside then why would you want one?

Reasons why your dog should be allowed indoors

Backyard dogs are bored

Even the very best owner may only spend a maximum of 2 hours a day actively engaged with their outdoor dog. In bad weather this often drops to zero! This means an outdoor dog will spend a staggering 22 hours a day alone, minimum. This is not a good scenario for a pack animal. Imagine yourself spending 22 hours a day, every day, with no human company!

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Bored dogs find novel ways to entertain themselves

When left isolated for long periods of time dogs find novel ways to entertain themselves. Often humans do not approve of the ways dogs entertain themselves such as fence-running, barking, chewing, digging and escaping.

It is psychologically cruel

Dogs are social animals that thrive in human companionship; we've bred them that way. Dogs have been domesticated to live as companions for humans. They cannot perform that function when isolated from the pack in the backyard, deprived of human companionship. They become stressed and anxious when forced to live this way.

Backyard dogs have higher surrender rates

Research shows that outdoor dogs have higher surrender rates. This is due to the fact that they are not considered an active part of the family. This makes them far easier to 'dispose' of when they become inconvenient due to behavioural problems.

Backyard dogs are harder to train

They are often so overwhelmed by the mere presence of a human that they cannot contain their excitement. A stressed, excited or hyperactive dog is incapable of concentrating, much less learning. Even when taken out of their environment for training they are so stimulated that they cannot pay attention long enough to learn anything new. They are often not as bonded to the family which in turn makes them harder to train.

Backyard dogs are stressed

The domestication process has conditioned dogs to live with humans, as part of a pack. Any dog kept socially isolated from its pack will become stressed and/or depressed. Living outside of a pack is unnatural to them. Stressed dogs get sick more often because stress affects the immune and central nervous systems.

Outdoor dogs can be stolen, baited or set free easily

Having an outdoor dog means you are giving people free access to your dog. This means that it can be stolen easily for re-sale (it happens!) by unscrupulous people. Also, if your dog has become a neighbourhood nuisance, it can be baited (poisoned) easily or even set-free.

Dogs feel heat and cold too

Dogs feel changes temperature just like humans do. If it's cold outside you can bet your dog's feeling cold. They can also suffer from heatstroke, sunburn etc. Long term sun exposure can lead to skin damage and cancer just like humans.



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Bring Your Dog Indoors

Your dog should have indoor access at a minimum when you are home. You do not have to be actively engaged with your dog when he's indoors, most dogs are happy just to be with you while you watch TV, work on your computer etc.

You may need to train your dog how to behave appropriately indoors but this can be achieved. Until you have trained him how to behave indoors you will need to manage his time indoors with leads, crates, baby gates etc. Don't just let him roam the house and get into trouble – teach him how to behave.

You'll be surprised how your dog will even prefer to be indoors in a crate to isolated outdoors. At least in a crate he can watch the family in much the same way as humans watch television, this alone is mental stimulation and makes him feel more like part of the family. Then, when you have time, you can bring him out – on a lead – and carefully supervise him. Be sure to reward him for calm, appropriate behaviour.

If you're still having trouble teaching your dog how to behave indoors, contact us to arrange a private consultation.



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