

LIFESTYLE

Dogs and the Great Outdoors

Dogs love the outdoors. Just watch one blazing through a hiking trail, chasing a ball or swimming in a pond. Eyes gleam, fur flies and all is right in the canine cosmos. But the great outdoors to a dog is like the lights and excitement of a Vegas casino to us—a fun place to visit, but you wouldn't want to live there.

People often get a dog with the assumption that he'll live happily alone in the back yard. Perhaps the kids will play with him after school and Dad will provide a walk in the morning. Fido ought to be just fine the rest of the time. Right? Wrong. Those same owners are the ones who end up with dogs who dig, bark excessively, claw at screen doors and windows, and cause all sorts of destruction. What those problems have in common is they are usually the result of boredom, along with a desire to be indoors with the family.

Dogs are social, pack animals. They enjoy the company of humans and other dogs and dislike isolation. So it's easy to see how taking a social, pack-oriented animal and expecting it to live a mostly isolated life can lead to problems. The good news is, it's not too late. Even if Fido absolutely can not come indoors, i.e. a child is allergic, there's

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Going to the Dogs



hope. Consider getting him a companion. You might think two dogs will be twice the work, but really, it's half. I love knowing that while I'm gone, my dogs have each other for company. Sure, there's more poop-scooping, but less guilt and happier dogs, which equals less problem behaviors. If a second dog is not an option, be sure Fido has things to keep him busy, i.e. interactive food toys, and perhaps a mid-day visit from a neighbor or dog walker. Or, switch off play dates with a neighbor's dog.

Back to the Great Indoors. You're probably worried that Fido will be a Tasmanian devil, tearing around the house, leaving a path of destruction in his wake. He'll knock the kids down and grab things off counters. That's a fair assumption, if you leave him to his own devices. Instead, let's set him up to succeed. Isolate a room for initial indoor visits by closing doors or using baby gates. Move anything valuable, breakable or

ingestible out of reach. Have a dog bed ready. Next, set up a tether. Loop a leash around a sturdy furniture leg. Your dog's collar will clip to this. (Be sure your dog wears a flat buckle collar when tethering.) The last thing to prepare is a chew bone or stuffed food toy.

Exercise Fido outdoors first, then wait fifteen minutes. Dogs' adrenaline levels take time to return to normal after a workout, just like ours. Be sure he has eliminated. Then, clip the leash on and bring him indoors. Let Fido greet family members, walk around a bit on leash, then tether him on the dog bed with the chewie. Be sure someone stays on or near the dog bed with him. Dogs who have never been tethered may panic or fight it. We want Fido to enjoy tethering—that's why we're pairing it with a nice soft dog bed, a great chewie and best of all, our company. Any time Fido lays there calmly, softly say, "Good boy!" then reward with verbal praise, petting or even a treat. Rewarding calm results in more frequent calm behavior.

Do short indoor visits at first, switching between tethering and moving about with Fido leashed. Eventually, neither the leash nor the tether will be necessary. Our goal is to teach the house rules,

i.e. no jumping on couches, counters or kids, while maintaining control and gradually expanding his area. Do training sessions indoors, so he learns to focus on and listen to you. If necessary, consult a trainer for assistance. Teach basic behaviors, especially a down-stay. There are a lot of things a dog can't be doing while in a down-stay, and once he learns that one, the tether won't be necessary.

It's worth the effort to make your dog part of the family. Just ask Debbie and Armando Jimenez of Stevenson Ranch. Their Chocolate-Lab, Cocoa, spent most of her first year outdoors. She was wild and out of control. The Jimenezes are now working with a trainer (yours truly) to make Cocoa an indoor dog. After a month of effort, everyone is happier, including Cocoa. Debbie sums it up best: "Having Cocoa indoors has made her part of the family!"

Nicole Wilde runs Gentle Guidance Dog Training, offering in-home behavior modification and obedience training. She is the co-host of "Dog Talk," heard on Santa Clarita's AM1220 Saturdays at 8:30 a.m. For information call 299-5704 or www.gentleguidance4dogs.com.