

Inside Or Out? - Making Your Dog Part Of The Family

Some dog owners believe that dogs, especially large ones, should be “outdoor only” pets. At the Denver Dumb Friends League, we believe that dogs of all sizes are happier, healthier and safer when they can be indoors with their people the majority of the time. Dogs have a need to be social just like we do.

Exercise

Some people believe that dogs need to be outside so they can get plenty of exercise. The truth is that most dogs don't exercise when they're in a yard by themselves; they spend most of their time lying by the back door, waiting for “their people” to either let them in or come out and play with them. However, dogs do need exercise every day, so we recommend walking your dog or engaging him in a regular game of fetch!

Socialization

Dogs need to spend time with “their people” in order to learn their rules and how to get along with them. Dogs that spend most of their time alone or only in the company of other dogs may demonstrate fearful, aggressive or overactive behavior toward family members or strangers because they've never learned how to act around people.

Safety

Dogs that spend most of their time outdoors are at risk for a variety of reasons. They could escape from the yard and become lost; a disgruntled neighbor could throw poison over the fence or spray the dog with mace or pepper spray; or the dog could be stolen and possibly sold to a research facility or dog-fighting ring.

Behavior Problems

Dogs left alone in the yard for long periods of time often get bored, lonely and frustrated. As a result, they may dig or bark excessively. Most cities have noise ordinances that penalize owners of barking dogs. If a dog escapes the yard in search of interesting things to do, not only is he at risk of being injured by a car, but his owner is liable for any damage or harm that he might do.

Protection

Dogs that spend time with their owners and feel attached to them are more likely to be protective of “their family.” Dogs that spend most of their time outdoors may be friendly to any stranger who pets or feeds them. Alternatively, some yard dogs may become overly territorial and feel the need to protect their territory even from family and friends. If a dog is hardly ever allowed to come indoors, it will be difficult for him to distinguish between family, friends and uninvited “guests.”

Puppies

People who are away from home for eight to ten hours a day may be inclined to leave their new puppy in the yard because he can't control his bowels and bladder for that length of time. Although it's true that puppies need to eliminate more frequently than adult dogs, it's also very important for puppies to receive adequate people time at this formative stage of their lives. If dogs aren't adequately socialized when they're young, they're likely to become fearful or aggressive toward people, and possibly other animals. Puppies are also more vulnerable to extreme weather conditions than adult dogs. If you must be away from home for more than four or five hours at a time every day, this may not be the right time for you to adopt a puppy.

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The Garage

While dogs may be safer in the garage than in the yard, unless people spend time with them in the garage, they'll still suffer from isolation and, as a result, may develop any of the behavior problems previously mentioned. Most garages are very hot during the summer months and cold during the winter. Garages are often storage places for tools and chemicals that could cause injury to a curious dog. If the garage has an automatic door opener, the dog could run out into the street when the door is opened.

Changing Times

Some of us may have fond childhood memories of a family dog that lived outside, but times have changed. More mothers used to stay at home and children used to spend more time outdoors. The outdoor dog had company while mom hung laundry or gardened and the children played outside. With the advent of two-income families, television and computer games, the outdoor dog is more likely to spend most of his time alone.

No Alternative

If you must leave your dog outdoors, unsupervised for extended periods of time, please provide him with the following:

- An insulated shelter with a wind-proof opening. Some very short-coated breeds like greyhounds, beagles and labs, may not be able to tolerate extreme cold, even with a shelter.
- Shade in the summertime. All dogs need shade, but remember that heavy-coated dogs, such as huskies and chows, are more susceptible to the heat.
- Fresh food and water every day. In winter, you'll need a heated water bowl to keep the water from freezing. In summer, you'll need a tip-proof bowl so your dog won't tip the bowl over in an effort to get cool.
- Interactive play time daily.
- A daily walk.
- An escape-proof fence with a locked gate.
- "Busy" toys (see our handout: "Dog Toys and How to Use Them").

Most dogs do enjoy spending time outdoors, but the time dogs spend alone outdoors must be balanced with quality time with "their people." With a little time and training, dogs can learn to be well-behaved around people and can come to respect the house rules. They can then be left inside alone without cause for worry and be trusted companions and members of the family.

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