

As those of us with dogs quickly figured out, man's best friend is not necessarily his lawn's best friend. The good news is that there are practical solutions to the most common and frustrating lawn problems related to dogs.

“Help! Spot is making spots!”

The first problem is the spotting that develops under dog waste. Nitrogen in the waste, particularly in urine, can kill or “burn” patches of grass and produce brown spots (sometimes with green rings around them). This is especially true with female dogs since they eliminate all in one spot and all at once, as opposed to males, who mark their territory and tend to eliminate in various places. There are several possible remedies for this problem, including taking your dog to other areas besides your lawn to eliminate, training the dog to eliminate in a special, designated spot, and flushing the spot with water after elimination to dilute the nitrogen. The first option is probably the least practical, although the added exercise does offer health benefits to you and the dog. The second option involves creating an area that would not be affected by waste, such as a section of gravel or mulch, and training the dog to eliminate there. Adding a “marking post” like a large rock, bird bath, or lawn ornament might increase the dog's susceptibility to the training. The last option would also work if you were diligent about watering spots within 8 hours of elimination.



Now it must be mentioned that while there are a lot of dietary remedies people have tried, there are two major problems with most of them. First, some just flat do not work and are a waste of time. Second, some of them can be harmful to your dog, which is not worth it regardless of whether it does happen to fix your lawn problem. A couple of safe changes you could make are feeding your dog wet food or moistening their dry food as a way to increase hydration and dilute the nitrogen in the waste itself. Whatever you are thinking about trying, never make a significant or unusual modification to your dog's diet without consulting your veterinarian. What if you already have some spots? Most grasses will repair themselves in time if you rake off the dead grass and open the area to sunlight. If you want a quicker fix, you can lay seed or plant plugs of the same grass into the area. You can use a hand aerator (sold at most garden centers) to obtain a plug from existing lawn. In any case, be sure the area is watered daily until most of the dead grass is gone.

“I'm weary of the wearing!”

The other common canine problem is a dog's wearing out a path in the grass, often along the fence. This “doggie path” is inevitable no matter what kind of grass you have if your dog is constantly running in the same place over and over. One thing that can help is improving the soil. To do this, use a hand aerator along the path to reduce the compaction. Next, apply a light application of compost along the path and then lightly rake over it to fill in the aeration holes. Water the area deeply and infrequently. To help with water penetration, apply a surfactant to the area (you can use soapy dish water or buy a product like Revive at your local garden center). Mix in a small amount of liquid fertilizer to help keep the grass growing aggressively. Using a compost tea or humic product can also help by increasing microbial activity in the soil and improving the turf's root system.

You can also reseed the area on a regular basis, just be careful not to overseed. Another simple option is putting something in the middle of the “doggie path” to disrupt the run, but it's possible the dog may just go around it! And lastly, you could remove the grass and replace it with landscaping that will not wear down, such as gravel or mulch.

Out of the doghouse and into the yard...

Remember that though these problems can be frustrating, with a little extra time and effort, you can implement some solutions to your dog-and-lawn problems that are good for you, your lawn, and your four-legged friend.