

# The Indoor Dog

by Steve Grunow

One of the hardest messages to get across to many adopters and owners of dogs with behavior problems is that dogs NEED to live INDOORS WITH THEIR OWNERS if the dog is to behave well.

"California has a warm climate," unconvinced people object. "The dog will do fine outside." Other people say, "I have a huge yard. He'll be happy there."

These statements miss the point: Dogs need to live indoors because dogs are very social creatures, and indoors is where the people are.

To behave well, dogs need human companionship. Dr. Ian Dunbar, an internationally known behaviorist and veterinarian, states, "About 90 percent of dog behavior problems are due to social isolation." Excessive barking, destructive chewing, digging, and other canine misdeeds are often simply the results of a bored, anxious, lonely dog being by itself too much.

A "vicious cycle" can link outdoor dogs with behavior problems: An untrained dog's or puppy's indoor behavior is often obnoxious; so an uninformed and frustrated owner relegates the obnoxious dog more and more to the lonely backyard. The more the dog is alone, the more obnoxious the dog becomes; the more obnoxious the dog becomes, the more the owner leaves it alone.

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Dr. Dennis Fetko, a nationally known behaviorist and lecturer points out the obvious: "Your dog can't learn how to behave with people if it's not around people. People who get a dog and then leave it in their yard are inviting problems."

Indoor dogs tend to be calmer than outdoor dogs. Outdoor dogs on tethers or behind fences often get revved up by cats on fences, passing people, fluttering birds — which frustrate the dog because he can't get to them. The result can be what behaviorist and author William Campbell terms "barrier aggressive" dogs: animals which are sweethearts "in person", but who behind a fence or on a leash are habitual maniacs. "Keeping dogs outside makes them crazy," shrugs Bay Area behaviorist Susan Crook.

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In addition to the behavioral reasons for keeping dogs indoors, there are safety reasons: Outdoor dogs are at the mercy of malicious or thoughtless children (and adults). I know a Rottweiler, chained in his owner's front yard, who was routinely pelted with rocks by area children. Surprise, surprise — the dog became aggressive with children. I know of a backyard Labrador retriever whose owners caught neighbor children throwing firecrackers at the dog. The similar sounds of the backfiring of passing cars eventually came to terrorize the Lab so much that she chewed through the fence to escape. A client's friendly American Staffordshire terrier puppy was poisoned in her backyard during the more recent pit bull scare.

Allowing a dog to be indoors does not have to mean giving Fido free run of the house. There are several ways

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to give an untrained dog in-house companionship and security within limits with which the owner is comfortable.

"Umbilical cording" is a term coined by trainer and author Job Michael Evans, meaning leashing a dog to its owner's belt loop. The owner moves about the house with the dog constantly in tow, under surveillance, under control. Umbilical cording reinforces the owner's position as "parent" or "leader". It is also good leash training. If the owner is going to sit for awhile, maybe watching TV, a chew toy can help occupy the dog and keep it calm and quiet.

A gate across the doorway can confine an untrained dog to a relatively indestructible room, such as the kitchen. This gives the new dog some access to in-home companionship without putting carpets and furniture at risk.

Appropriately confining a dog to a crate as discussed in our Summer 1989 issue is another way of restricting your dog.

Using a "tiedown" means leashing your dog to a piece of furniture or to a hardware "eyelet" screwed into your baseboard near where the owner sits. This is another way to give Spot limited, but crucial, access to home and people. Be aware that without a chew toy, a tied-down dog may chew its leash or the furniture to which the dog is connected.

Dogs are companion animals. They cannot be our companions unless they are with us. The intent here is to clarify why our companionship is so important to these animals and to suggest some ways to make it feasible to owners.