

Where Does Your Dog Live?

By Brenda Howard

My dogs live in my house. Yes, I used the plural of dog because there is more than one. Yes, I vacuum a lot! My dogs live in my house because I know that they enjoy my company and I enjoy theirs. I am reasonable about this living arrangement – the dogs are not able to stay in my house for 8 or 10 hours if I have to be away. If I must be gone for a long time period they are in a safe yard – big, securely fenced and safe. I live on 35 acres. I do not let my dogs have the entire 35 acres for their yard because it is unnecessary.

I have observed large, medium and small dogs of various breeds for years and I can tell you that most dogs sleep a lot. They exercise and play hard, but they sleep a lot. They do not require vast spaces of land for play and exercise.

Many people believe that dogs must have total freedom, that to fence them is cruel. I disagree. It is my responsibility to provide my dogs with exercise, shelter, food, water, vet care, training, and a safe and secure fenced yard. I want them to live a happy, healthy long life with me. Acreage was not part of the agreement, nor need it be! A dog without a secure place to be is a dog that is going to get into mischief.

Dogs left to their own devices will roam farther and farther (especially intact males). They will enter your neighbor's property, run the neighbors fence line to agitate the neighbor dog, chase cattle and horses, dig holes in the neighbor's yard, or worse. A dog on it's own will find the smelliest stinkiest dead thing and then roll on it, or EAT the same stinky dead thing (prompting it to vomit said stinky mess on your lawn or carpet later). Letting a dog roam loose is a bit like letting a 10 year old child have the keys to the car with a full tank of gas – a recipe for trouble!

So you tell me you live on 100 or 1000 acres and you don't intend to fence your dog in. Why did you want a dog? Did you want a dog to work cattle? A real working dog is with it's handler all of the time, and therefore is not loose on its own. If you plan to purchase a breed that excels in working cattle and sheep, such as a blue heeler and you intend to teach the dog to work, you can be the exception to the rule. The rule is this – provide a safe place for your dog to be at all times.

What about chaining the dog or using a tie out? Not the best option. A dog tied out is a dog that is prey to every other "bully" dog running loose. Maybe this is where the term "trapped like dog" came from - clearly a bad situation for a dog to be in.

Ok, you live in a lovely neighborhood that borders a park or golf course and none of the homes have fences, but you want a dog. One option is to have an electric fence professionally installed and your dog trained to understand the fence. Most of these fence types work by radio frequency. The dog will be required to wear a collar. The

boundaries of the fence are established. The dog will receive a warning beep from the collar as it gets too close to the boundary. The dog will then receive a shock when it reaches the boundary. The idea is that the dog will learn to avoid the shock – the deterrent. For many dogs this works very well. This type of containment may keep your dog in, but it won't keep other dogs out.

A fenced area can be as small as a few feet wide by 10 or 12 feet long – a "run" for the dog to be in if you don't want to construct a conventional back yard fence. A dog run with shade can be a very good answer to the problem of outdoor space for you dog.

The best living arrangement is one that gives your dog time outdoors and time indoors with you and your family. My dogs are either in a securely fenced "doggie" safe yard (nothing available to chew up that could hurt them), on a leash, loose in my house under my supervision, or in a crate.

Brenda Howard has been training dogs for over 20 years and is a member of The Association of Pet Dog Trainers, The American Bloodhound Club, and The American Boarding Kennels Association.

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