Outdoor Containment: Underground Fences 101

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Dogs, whether they live in a city, suburbia, or the countryside, are much safer in their own yards than anywhere else. Many problems can be avoided by confining your pet to a safe environment. He will be less likely to consume poisons (antifreeze, rat or mouse poison), chase wildlife or be hit by a car. Behind a fence, you can keep a closer eye on your dog and your neighbor can't complain about unwanted deposits in their yard. And then, of course, pets that stay home can't wander off, get lost, stolen or end up in an animal shelter.

Building a physical fence is one option, although it may not be the best option for you. Besides being unsightly and restrictive of your view, they can be expensive, difficult to construct, and in some communities, restricted by zoning ordinances.

The past decade has witnessed innovative new ideas in electronic pet containment from companies like Innotek. By using buried wires and containment collars, these systems can provide your dog with complete freedom within the safe boundary of his yard. Sometimes called hidden underground fences, they are easy to install and can be up to 10 times less expensive than constructing a fence, especially on large acreages. Hidden fence systems have prevented injury and saved the lives of literally thousands of dogs.

How Underground Fences Work

Instead of building a fence, you bury a wire around the perimeter of your yard. White boundary flags provide you and your dog with a visual reference. Your dog wears a special containment collar with a receiver that delivers an audible warning tone when he approaches the perimeter of his safe zone. If your dog continues towards the buried wire, he receives a low-level electrical correction. If he ignores the first correction and continues to move closer to the boundary, the intensity of the stimulation increases. Dogs quickly learn to stay away from the perimeter of their safe zone, thus reducing or eliminating the number of corrections experienced over time.

Many manufacturers, including Innotek, have collars with adjustable stimulation levels that start out at a barely noticeable level. As the dog gets close or tries to cross the perimeter of the containment zone, the intensity of the stimulation increases. This stimulation is similar to the sensation of static electricity. Boundaries are soon learned and the pet effectively stays within the wire just as if enclosed in a view-obstructing fence. Additionally, areas such as flower beds, shrubs, or swimming pools can be "fenced off" within your yard.

Easy to Install

The wire is not difficult to install. Just push a shovel into the ground 2"-3" deep, move the handle toward you, and a tiny trench is formed. Lay the wire into the trench and remove the shovel. Stepping on the raised ground closes the area without a trace or affecting the grass. Typically, it takes less around four or five hours for the entire unit to be installed.

Wireless Containment Systems

If your yard is not large, a wireless containment is an option. This barrier uses a radio signal that is emitted from a transmitter. The transmitter placed in your home or another building activates the dog's collar in the same way the traditional hidden fence does. These units are even easier to install - a circular zone is formed around the transmitter and radio waves cover a precise area. Since the perimeter is a specified distance from the transmitter, it may not follow the exact boundaries of your yard, but the pet soon learns his limits. The receiving collar and boundary flag training system are the same as with buried-wire hidden fences.

The big advantage of these wireless systems is their flexibility. You can move the transmitter - and thereby change the confinement area in your yard. You can take the entire unit with you on vacation or camping… and control your dog's activity while allowing him freedom to run.

Training and Safe Use

All hidden fence systems include a free instructional video to guide you through the installation and training process. Once you install your system, use the included boundary flags to teach your dog exactly where the wire is located. Walk your leashed dog through the yard and boundaries to teach him the warning tone and correction zone. In a few sessions, your dog will understand how the system works.

As effective and safe as hidden fences are at keeping dogs within the yard, they still require training and responsible pet ownership. Only put the containment collar on your dog when he's outside using the system. Replace/recharge the collar receiver batteries often, and avoid letting the collar get wet. For the safest results, we recommend that you closely monitor your dog while using the containment system, especially for the first few months. And never leave your dog outside unattended for long periods of time. (Remember, while a hidden fence can help keep your dog in your yard, it does nothing

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for keeping other animals and people out of your yard.)

With the right system, proper training, and your attention to safety, a hidden fence may just be the key to providing your dog the freedom to explore his yard, while avoiding dangers that lurk beyond.

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