

# How can I stop my dog's urine from burning the lawn?

Before you start implementing changes to correct lawn burn, you need to make sure that your dog is actually the culprit. Several lawn diseases will look like lawn burn, with the small, characteristic brown patches. First, make sure that the brown spots are in areas where your dog urinates. Most dogs will have an area in the yard that they choose to use as the 'bathroom.' Secondly, make sure that the grass in the brown spots is still firmly attached. Grab a handful and give it a steady pull. If the grass is firmly rooted, then it points to lawn burn. If the whole bunch of grass pulls up, roots and all, then you may be dealing with a grub problem. And thirdly, make sure that your dog is the problem. If your neighbor's dog is coming into your yard and creating the problem it will not do any good to treat your own dog.

## The cause of lawn burn

Lawn burn is caused by the nitrogen in dog urine. Because dog urine is very high in nitrogen, when the dog urinates, it is similar to pouring liquid fertilizer on the lawn. A little fertilizer is good for the grass, but an excess causes nitrogen burn. The prevention of lawn burn deals with trying to reduce the amount of nitrogen coming into contact with the grass.

## Contributing factors

- There are several contributing factors that increase the likelihood of developing lawn burn.
- Female dogs are more likely to cause lawn burn than males because they void their entire bladder in one location instead of lifting their leg and marking, like males.
- Large dogs deposit more urine so they increase the quantity of nitrogen in one location, making lawn burn more likely.
- Those dogs, usually young active dogs, fed a high protein diet are more likely to produce a urine that causes lawn burn.
- Heavily fertilized yards are already receiving near maximum levels of nitrogen. The small amount of nitrogen in dog urine may be all that is needed to put these lawns over the edge and cause lawn burn.
- Lawns that are stressed are more susceptible to damage. Lawns that are suffering from drought, disease, or are newly sodded or seeded are more susceptible to lawn burn.

Successfully treating and preventing lawn burn often requires a multi-step approach.

1. Saturate the urinated spots with water. After the pet urinates, pour several cupfuls of water on the spot to dilute the urine.
2. Feed a high quality dog food that does not exceed the pet's protein requirement. High quality foods have more digestible protein sources that are more completely utilized by the pet and create less nitrogenous waste in the urine.
3. Encouraging your dog to drink more, will help dilute the urine and decrease the risk of lawn burn. Small amounts of non-salted broth in the drinking water may help increase your dog's water intake.
4. Train your dog to urinate in a location that is less visible. This approach is very effective for some owners that do not want to add supplements to their dogs' diet.
5. Replant your yard with more urine-resistant grasses. The most resistant grasses tend to be perennial ryegrasses and fescues. The most sensitive tend to be Kentucky bluegrass and Bermuda.
6. Feed your dog a supplement like Green-UM or Drs. Foster and Smith Lawn Guard, or apply a product to the lawn such as Dogonit Lawn Treatment. These products bind and neutralize the nitrogen in your pet's urine.
7. Reduce the stress on your lawn by not over- or under-fertilizing and by providing frequent watering.
8. If neighbors' dogs are causing the problem, you may advise your neighbors of the leash laws. Using a fence or motion-activated sprinkler may be helpful in keeping these dogs off of your lawn.

Brown spots created by lawn burn are not a medical threat to your dog, however, they can be unsightly and potentially expensive to repair. By understanding the cause of these spots, and then making a few changes, you should be able to give your dog full range of the yard and still enjoy a trouble-free lawn.

We have received a ton of questions on dog urine spots this year, probably because it has been a very dry April. Dog urine will burn leaf blades because the high concentration of salts in the urine will pull water out of the leaf dehydrating the leaf. This problem is exaggerated by warm and/or dry weather hastening water movement out of the leaf, thus increasing rate and degree of burn. Unfortunately, there are only two solutions to preventing urine spots. Preventing the dog from urinating on the turf is the best option. The second, less effective option is to thoroughly water the area where the dog has urinated, preferably prior to the urine drying on the leaf. A very remote solution could be to replant with a species called alkali grass (aka. Fultz weeping alkali grass) may be able to withstand the salts better than our traditional lawn grasses like bluegrass, ryegrass and tall fescue. Unfortunately, this grass doesn't withstand IN summers in the southern 1/2 to 2/3rds of the state and it must be irrigated to survive in northern IN. Given the inevitable loss of our traditional turf species to dog urine, we have very little to lose and it might be worth the risk on regularly irrigated lawns.

### ***References and Further Reading***

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