



# Have pets and want a

Balancing domestic pet use with maintaining a lawn can be a challenge. It's often a balancing act to protect the landscape from the pets and the pets from the landscape.

There are a few considerations when attempting to protect a lawn from pets. Good dog-proof lawns have a rapid growth rate, are deep-rooted, and are well matched for the climate. Deep-rooted turf is more drought tolerant, and growing one that is climate-appropriate helps ensure the turf endures less stress. A stressed lawn is less likely to survive additional stresses such as pet activities.

Mowing lawns to a minimum of 3 inches or higher helps keep the lawn cool and shade itself. Shorter cutting heats up the lawn and makes it dry out faster. Deep,

less frequent watering opposed to short, frequent watering promotes drought tolerance. Less frequent watering makes the roots "chase" the water and grow deeper into the soil instead of being spoiled with frequent watering, which causes shallow rooting. Soil should be wet to a depth of about 12 inches after each watering.

## Selecting turf species

Kentucky bluegrass and tall fescue are two good options for a pet-friendly lawn. Kentucky bluegrass is not usually genetically pure. There can be variations or different cultivars in a bag of grass seed listed as Kentucky bluegrass. This genetic variability makes Kentucky bluegrass adaptable to lots of conditions.

Unlike some lawn grasses, Kentucky bluegrass plants grow in a way that allows them to refill holes in the lawn when they develop. Given enough resources, it can recover easily from damage and is heat, cold, and drought tolerant. Tall fescue is also deep-rooted and drought tolerant. It tends to be able to withstand higher traffic areas.

Perennial ryegrass can tolerate traffic and establishes quickly but is not long-lived. It is also less tolerant of cold, especially winter wind. Bermuda grass is sometimes recommended for pet-friendly lawns but is a warm-season grass and not appropriate for most Wyoming climates. Fine fescues can be successful in Wyoming climates, but do not stand up to traffic very well or do a good job of quickly recovering from damage. They are not as heat tolerant as other turf species.

There are many options available for turf seed when scouring the shelves of home and garden stores. Consult with your local University of Wyoming Extension for recommendations in your area. For further reading about turf species for Wyoming, please refer to this excellent bulletin, <https://bit.ly/wyo-turf>.



Ancelens Huang, shutterstock

# healthy lawn?

**Different turf species hold up better than others when pets do what pets do**

## Keeping turf healthy

There can still be challenges with keeping lawns untarnished by pets even when a good pet-friendly lawn is established. Three specific challenges come to mind: urine spots, tracks or paths, and digging.

Kentucky bluegrass or tall fescue turf will help with urine stains in lawns because of their higher recovery rate but diluting the spots can also help. This can, but doesn't have to mean, following your dog with a water hose every time it goes. Proper hydration of pets will help decrease the amount of salts and nitrogen in their urine that most often causes urine stains.

Pets can develop paths or personal space in yards like a fence line they like to pace. Adding a stone walkway or a thicker mulch layer between a fence and planting can help minimize turf damage. Encouraging a pet to spread-out across the landscape versus being concentrated can help alleviate the effects of paths and urine spots. Adding shade from either trees or structures may help a pet better utilize a space.

Digging, wretched digging! Some pets are more prone to digging than others, and it can be a challenging behavior to alter. Sometimes providing a pet with a specific place to dig helps if the

space consists of an easier digging material such as mulch or gravel as opposed to hard clay earth, for example. Encouraging them to dig there by burying bones or treats can be successful. Fencing out regions of the landscape can also be an option, especially if there is more than one digging culprit such as a dog, chickens, and wild rabbits.

## Pet safety turf

Although turf is often the foundation of a landscape, there are other elements like flowers or trees that make up the space. Pets (and visiting wildlife) tend to be very curious creatures that do a lot of exploring with their noses and mouths, so it's important to be aware of potentially toxic plants in the landscape.

Some common plants found in Wyoming landscapes known to be toxic to cats and dogs are borage, chokecherry, clematis, daffodils, dahlia, geranium, iris, moss rose, and dianthus. For a complete list of toxic plants, visit the Animal Poison Control Center toxic plant list here: <https://bit.ly/poisonous-plants-pets>. This list also includes many common houseplants worth reviewing.

Insect nests (such as wasps) and compost piles are additional dangers to consider. Compost

## Pet pleasing turf

Turf grass is often the foundation of a yard, but is it pet friendly? Turf itself is not usually a safety concern for pets, but it's important to keep pets in mind when yards are treated with pesticides. Pesticide labels note whether or not products are safe for pets as well as re-entrance intervals. Most of the time, once a product is dry, it's safe for a pet to be on it, but always consult the label. Also carefully consider whether to use animal byproduct-based products such as bone meal and poultry manure since a pet may want to consume them.

can cause upset stomachs if consumed. Additionally, ensure fencing is safe and effective. Investigating a hole in a fence or around a shed could lead a pet to becoming stuck in the hole and result in an injury or another unfavorable outcome. Lastly, be mindful of tools left lying in the yard, and open water such as ponds or hot tubs that could harm pets.

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