



DOG TRAINING SOLUTIONS

Does your dog chew grass?

My dog crops grass like a cow. He eats it with gusto whenever he encounters it, to the extent that my friends have begun to refer to him, jokingly, as 'The Ruminant'. This habit of his doesn't bother me at all, since it seems to have no ill-effects on him whatsoever - although, when I'm standing outside in the cold waiting for him to relieve himself during one of his infrequent small-hours toilet calls (normally his timing is much more considerate), it's hard not to hop impatiently from foot to foot while he enthusiastically tears out the mandatory five to seven mouthfuls of grass, chews thoroughly, and swallows, instead of just getting on with the task at hand.

Unless your dog's digestion is suffering unwanted upheavals from his grass-eating habit, it's not really a problem. Dogs have been eating grass since the dawn of time (or at least, of the species) with few ill-effects, aside from the odd bout of vomiting - and really, this is one of those things that seems to bother owners a lot more than their dogs; most dogs, will simply re-ingest the vomitus and go about their day unfazed.

Truthfully, nobody really knows why dogs eat grass. There are a variety of theories as to why animals that are widely regarded as carnivores would willingly consume moderate quantities of vegetation.

One of said theories pertains to the fact that dogs are not, actually, carnivores. They're *omnivores*, which literally means, "eat anything".

This theory postulates that the modern-day dog eats grass in a deliberate attempt to supplement his diet with nutrients that are missing from his daily meals. The main crux, thrust, and gist of this argument centers around the idea that dogs, as omnivorous animals, are eating too much meat and need to balance this out with some greenery on the side, much as you or I might crave a nice tart salad to go with our steak.

If you ask me, this is nonsense. First of all, most of us feed our dogs primarily on kibble, which contains the full spectrum of fully absorbable nutrients that dogs require (or at least, *high quality* kibble does; I can't vouch for the quality of supermarket-brand dog food). If you're feeding your dog on meat alone, whether canned or fresh, there may be some substance to this theory - dogs need a wide range of vitamins and minerals for optimum health, most of which are not contained within fresh meat. It's true that canned meat has some added nutrients; the main problem with canned food is that it's too soft and jelly-like to maintain healthy teeth and bowels. Dogs fed primarily on canned food are far more prone to developing dental disease at a relatively early age (not to mention an increased incidence of constipation and flatulence, from the lack of fibre and roughage).

As far as dog food goes, unless your dog's on a specific, prescribed diet, kibble should constitute the main part of his diet - you can add a few spoonfuls of canned meat for variety and temptation, if you like.

Another popular theory is that dogs use grass as a sort of natural emetic: that, since a nauseous dog lacks the phalangeal structure necessary for the good old 'finger down the throat' move, he'll resort to nature's bounty as an alternative. It's true that grass does sometimes make dogs vomit - those tickly stems can irritate the stomach lining, and there have been a few occasions when I've seen dogs vomit up a chunk of

something that's proved to be indigestible, and along with the offending article, there's also been a clump of grass in the vomit too.

However – and I'm sorry to pour cold water over this one too – I have to say that this is pure conjecture, and somewhat nonsensical conjecture at that. Dogs are perfectly capable of vomiting all by themselves, without the assistance of grass; I've seen too many dogs enjoying a post-prandial mouthful of mixed lawn greens, without any regurgitational side effects, to lend the theory any credence.

If you're worried that eating grass is going to hurt your dog, you can lay that concern to rest right now. The one possible downside is that he'll irritate his throat or stomach lining, but this issue will only cause him strife for a second or two at most: he'll either cough the problem away, or will toss his cookies without further ado (which rarely bothers most dogs).

Really, grass eating is nothing to worry about – it's a life-long habit with many dogs, and if yours does decide that it's no longer in his best interests, he'll simply stop eating it all by him.

You may need to keep an eye on him around recently treated lawns, or anywhere where nasties like pesticides, snail bait, and rat poison could be around, since most garden chemicals are highly toxic to dogs. Ideally, you'd be keeping an eye on him anyway if he's around those substances, but grass-eaters are at higher risk than most since they're more likely to ingest plant matter than herbicides and other toxic chemicals have been sprayed onto.

In addition to this, it's also best if he's kept away from those clumps of dried-out grass that lie around on the lawn after it's been freshly mowed. It shouldn't be a problem if the grass is mowed by a push-mower; but if it's been through a gas-operated machine, the grass will be tainted with petrol fumes and grease, which at best will taste horrible and at worst can make him pretty sick. (Fortunately for your peace of mind and your dog's peace of digestive tract, all but the most food-obsessed dogs will usually spurn this smelly fare in favour of clean, fresh grass.)

If your dog's grass eating is really bothering you, presumably this is out of concern for your lawn, rather than your dog, since there's ample evidence that dogs suffer no adverse effects from frequent grassy snacks. There are a couple of things you can try doing to reduce his desire to supplement his diet with eatables from the backyard – but, because this is one area of dogdom that nobody really knows that much about (scientists are frankly mystified by the appetite of the average dog for verdure), the success rate is more hit-and-miss than guaranteed:

- Try varying his diet slightly. Unlike humans, dogs do not need a widely varied diet to keep them “interested” in food; they're creatures of routine, and diet is no exception to this rule. However, since one of the theories that attempts to explain why dogs eat grass is centred around a lack of nutritional variety, you can try introducing various tasty vegetables into his food: most dogs enjoy tomatoes, carrots (either steamed or raw) and chopped apples. Be sure to stay well away from grapes, raisins, and onions, since these are toxic to dogs.
- Supervise him whenever he's around grass. This may not be a particularly user-friendly option, especially for off-lead walks; you'll have to keep a real eagle-eye on your canine walking buddy to make sure he's not making a dash for the greenery.

Realistically, there's not really a lot you can do about your dog's grass-eating habit (aside from deny him access to grass utterly, which wouldn't be fair to your dog and would make your daily dog-walking expeditions more of an exercise in frustration than a relaxing stroll).

The general consensus from the experts seems to be that grass eating, although somewhat of an enigmatic pastime to us humans, is just 'one of those things' as far as your dog is concerned. It won't do him any harm, and you can be sure that if he's eating it, he's enjoying it – so there's really not a lot to be said for depriving him of that simple pleasure.

Furthermore, and in addition to the logistics of permitting this penchant, I've got to say that watching your dog ripping up and chewing generous mouthfuls of turf with an expression of half-lidded bliss on his face can provide you (and passers-by) with some unexpected entertainment when the two of you are out and about together!

For further reading ...

For more information on dog psychology and general canine behavioural traits, with a particular focus on problematic behaviours, you'll probably want to take a look at SitStayFetch. It's a complete, detailed manual for the intelligent and responsible owner, and covers everything from obedience training through to preventing and handling a huge variety of common problem behaviours. Well worth checking out!

You can visit the SitStayFetch website by clicking on the link below:

<http://www.kingdomofpets.com/dogobediencetraining/?aff=cbdtsol608&type=nohop>