



Paw Prints

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Columnist

Is your dog bored?

Does your furry friend sometimes morph into a Tasmanian devil in your absence? It's likely

because he's lonely and bored, bored, bored.

You might wonder why your pooch is bored. He may have a whole backyard to himself or he may have five acres. The problem is that you aren't there.

Dogs are pack animals — they like to be with other dogs. We separate them from their mom and the companionship of their littermates when they are only 8 weeks old. If you have only one dog, you and your family are the other members of your dog's pack. Rover looks to you for companionship and attention.

So, if he doesn't get enough, it can drive him a little crazy.

Life can't be

one long dog-park visit, but does your dog understand that? Probably not. The reality is that many dogs stay at home while their pet parents are at work during the day. Rather than whine around the house complaining there's nothing to do, like a bored kid, your home-alone dog may be stirring up trouble.

Often, the dogs that have behavior problems have lots of energy and nothing to do.

It's important to know that your furry family member is not doing this out of spite. Spite is a human trait, but not a canine one. Your dog isn't going to smooch you goodbye when you head off to work in the morning, just to start plotting against

you before your car leaves the driveway.

When your dog becomes bored, his choices to amuse himself

will be different than yours.

Left to their own devices lonely dogs have been known to gnaw furniture legs, chew shoes, shred pillows, bark excessively, and get into the trash. It's dog boredom that often causes these sorts of destructive behaviors.

You're his main source of entertainment. You determine when he eats, plays, and exercises. If you don't give him enough to do he's going to get bored, and bored dogs get into trouble.

In other words, you may have a stay-at-home dog with no job prospects and too much time on his paws. And that can spell trouble if you don't find something worthwhile to occupy his time.

To prevent destructive behaviors, he needs something that will engage his doggie senses. You need to give your furry friend something more constructive to do.

Hide the treats game or scavenger hunt can keep your dog busy when you're gone. Just select some of Rover's favorite treats and hide them in unusual spots. The more challenging the hiding place the longer it will take to find, which will help him to better pass the time.

If your dog is a couch potato and enjoys watching

TV, he may enjoy watching Animal Planet, nature shows, or some of the new DVDs that are produced especially for bored dogs. These videos include the kinds of things that dogs might enjoy watching in real life, such as other dogs, cats and even squirrels.

Music is another way to soothe Rover when you're gone. And dogs seem to be more interested in easy listening or classical tunes than heavy metal. So, set your pooch's favorite music on a timer to come on intermittently during the day.

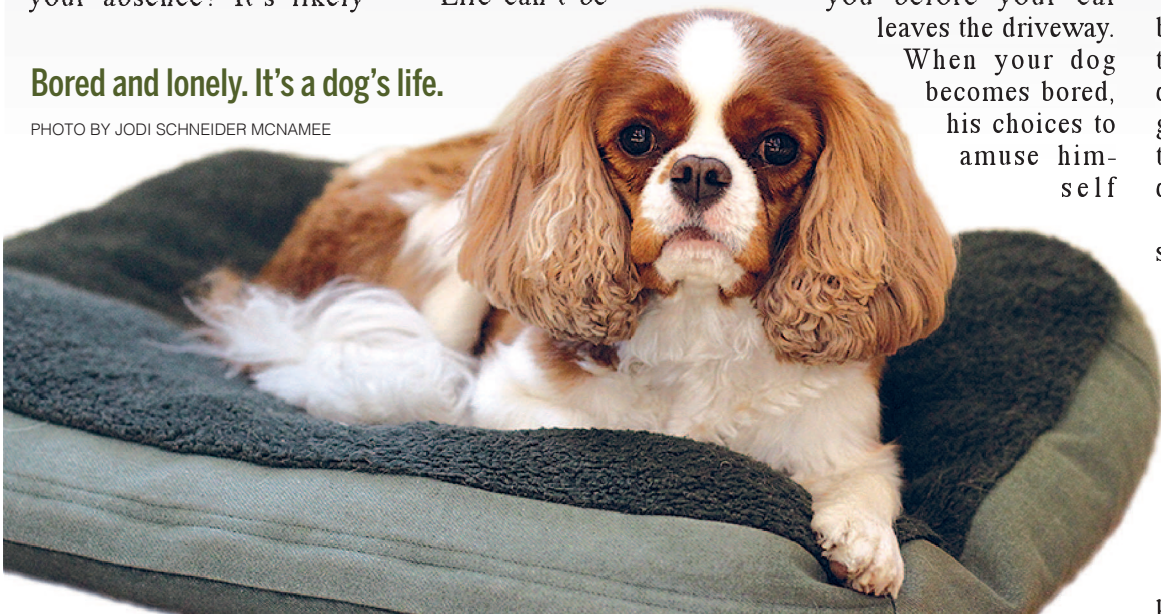
A tired dog is not a bored dog, and the best way to ensure your pooch isn't bored when he's alone is to make sure he gets plenty of exercise when you two are together. Walk him for an hour a day or let him play at a dog park to help burn off excess energy.

And while many behavioral problems stem from boredom, the answer isn't necessarily just adding in more physical exercise. When it comes to mental stimulation it doesn't take much to tire out your dog; a frozen Kong, full of his favorite treats, may tire him out as much as that walk.

A good combination of physical and mental exercise is what helps keep your dog happy and entertained.

Bored and lonely. It's a dog's life.

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