

Barking Dogs Problems
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We recently saw an article that discussed how frustrating barking dog problems can be for neighbors and dog owners alike. Both often feel harassed, misunderstood and angry. Not only can dogs bark for many different reasons, but what seems excessive barking to one person may go virtually unnoticed by another.

Although the neighbor who is bothered by a barking dog may wish for an overnight solution to the problem, this may not always be possible. One easy method is to keep the dog inside or at least let the dog have access to the house when the barking is a problem. If there are other behavior problems that prevent the dog from staying inside, these may have to be resolved first.

There are a number of devices available which are designed to punish the dog in one way or another for barking. Bark collars are triggered by the vibration of the dog's vocal cords to send a signal that causes the collar to either shock the dog, emit a loud, ultrasonic noise, or release an unpleasant odor, such as citronella (the ingredient in insect-repelling candles).

The advantage of these collars is that they generally meet the criteria for effective punishment: they deliver punishment immediately, consistently, are not dependent on the owner, and the punishment is usually sufficiently unpleasant to inhibit the barking quickly.

The disadvantages are that none of these punishers will inhibit barking in all dogs, the punishment can have some unwanted side effects such as causing the dog to become fearful, aggressive (more of a problem with shock) or trigger other problems such as destructiveness, housesoiling or escaping. Using a bark collar without an understanding of why the dog is barking can potentially cause more problems than it resolves.

A bark collar should never be used on a dog who is barking from fear or anxiety as this will almost assuredly create other problems. A dog who is barking because she has nothing else to do needs to be given more attention and an enriched environment. Dogs who bark to defend their territory may need to be taught to be more friendly to people and other dogs.

Although we know how annoying barking dog problems can be, and we believe that dog owners should take responsibility for their pets' impact on others, we also do not believe that a quick fix is always the best approach to the problem.