



# dog's green earth

How to have both a happy dog and a happy garden

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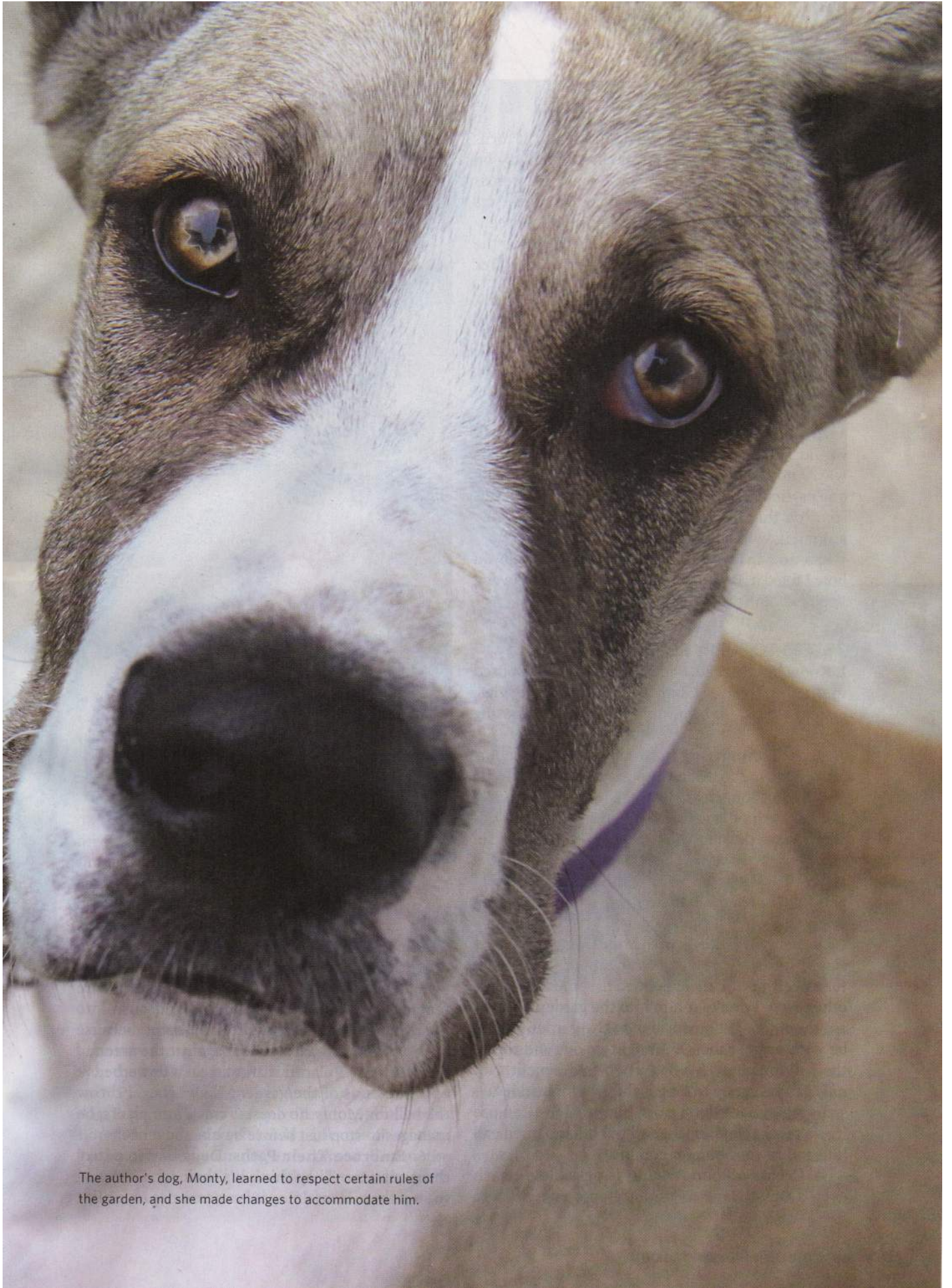
**I CALLED OUT TO** Monty, my eight-month-old Great Dane puppy. His head popped out from behind a yew with a look that said, "This had better be important." He decided it wasn't and went back to doing whatever it was he was doing. "Monty, come!" I shouted. And when the response was none I stalked over to see what could possibly be more interesting than me holding a handful of SnackySnax.

As I pushed the yew aside the full horror of the situation was revealed—a huge hole, irises scattered and a puppy caked in mud from the paws up. In short, one big mess.

I looked around at the urine-stained lawn, the trampled hellebores and the chewed-on grasses. My once beautiful garden had turned into some kind of Armageddon. I wasn't quite sure when or how this had happened, but I knew, right then, that things had to change.

## **DOGGONE DREAMS**

When I decided to get a dog I had a dream of how things would be. My dog would be trained (of course!) and obedient (definitely), and while I pruned my roses my trained, obedient dog would follow me around the garden. He might lounge in the sun while I knelt to do some weeding, or I would occasionally throw the ball for him in between deadheading.



The author's dog, Monty, learned to respect certain rules of the garden, and she made changes to accommodate him.

This wasn't how it worked out. Monty, it turns out, doesn't like the feel of the brick pathway on his paws and so he would take a short cut across the planting area to my greenhouse. On rainy days I would encourage him to come inside the greenhouse, but then he didn't like it when I closed the door and would whine and scratch to get out. Most days he would sit outside in the rain.

Yes, I would throw the ball for him on the lawn, but his braking system is somewhat flawed (being such a big dog) and he would often career into a camellia bush, breaking off branches here and there. He always urinated in the same area, making one corner of my lawn resemble a small leopard-print carpet. He loved to chew on my grasses, which would make him promptly vomit over the pathway. And, finally, he liked to lick the water from one particular recessed irrigation head. He did this so often that he made a small bowl-shaped hole around it, where the grass stopped growing.

So, now that you know my shame let me tell you how I fixed it. Because, you see, now Monty is a dog I can garden with.

### 7 STEPS TO PUPPY PEACE

**1. Know Your Breed.** Some breeds are predisposed to digging (terriers, border collies and beagles, among others), so be aware of this when choosing your dog.

**2. Train Your Dog to Come.** The most important command to teach your dog is to come. If your dog doesn't come when you call his name you have little chance of teaching him anything. Start with reward-based training. *If you come I will give you this yummy treat.* Make the treats really good in the beginning (I started with actual chicken pieces) and then downgrade them until you give nothing but praise when he comes to you.

**3. Be in the Garden with Your Dog.** I used to let Monty into the garden for a run around or to go out for a pee, but this always ended in some disaster or other. Now I don't let him into the garden unless I am there too. If I'm working in the garden he can be with or near me. Or I might go out and throw the ball for him. This has a two-fold benefit. Not only can he get up to no mischief, but if he does do something that I don't want him to then I can use it as a teachable moment and tell him no, then call him and reward him for coming.

**4. Create a Poop Area.** It is possible to teach even a Great Dane to go potty on command and



Above: The author's garden includes walkways, but Monty preferred to cut through beds. Right: See-through black wire fencing keeps Monty from barreling into plants when he plays.

only in a very small area. I created a fenced-in space, about five feet by eight feet. I covered it with gravel and started taking him here to do his eliminating. Getting him to do it the first time was the toughest, but once the smells were there he could do it on command. And now I take him to the poop area before I let him out into the garden at large, in order to minimize the leopard spots.

**5. Fence Off Spaces.** I bought some cheap wire fencing—the kind that you unfold and push into the ground. It's about two feet high and because it's black you can hardly see it against the green of the plantings. I placed it around each flowerbed at opposite ends of the garden. Now, when I throw the ball for Monty he doesn't crash into plants; he manages to stop just before he hits the fence.

**6. Embrace Their Paths.** Dogs like to patrol the perimeter. They think it's their job, so trying to stop them from doing it is an exercise in futility.



Let them pound a pathway and then embrace it as your own by putting down bark chips or gravel to stop their paws from getting muddy.

**7. Play with Your Dog.** A tired dog is a happy dog. But more importantly a tired dog is not bored. Boredom can lead to all kinds of destruction in the garden, so keep your dog entertained. Throw the ball while you weed if you like, so your dog has a task in the garden, too. You can also fill a hollow toy

with some treats, which will keep your canine friend busy while you get on with some work.

Finally, remember you own a dog for a reason, and that is to enjoy his company. Trying to keep your dog out of your garden is neither necessary nor ideal. You, your dog and your flowers can co-exist happily with a little bit of planning and patience. ☞

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