

Why Do Dogs Eat Grass?

by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

Grass-Eating Is a Common Occurrence in Dogs

Many dog owners usually feel alarmed whenever they see their beloved Fido chewing on their lawn. But the truth is that grass-eating, a behavior technically known as "pica," or eating things that are not characterized as food, is quite common among dogs. Even wild dogs have been found to do this.

In puppies and younger dogs, grass eating may be a sign of boredom or playful behavior. However, there are certain health-related reasons why some pets are prone to this – but they do it mainly to purge their system.

- **Dogs eat grass when they suffer from gastrointestinal upset.** Most of you are well aware that dogs will, on occasion, eat large amounts of grass in an attempt to make themselves throw up. When they exhibit this behavior, it tends to be almost frantic.

They'll whimper and cry to be let out, then they'll run outside and start eating any grass they can find; they're not selective.

After they consume a large amount of grass, they'll often times lick their lips because they're nauseous, and then of course, they'll vomit. It's completely normal for your dog to vomit occasionally (like people do when they are ill), meaning one or two times a year.

Most often it's nothing to worry about and, surprising as this may sound, your dog knows what's best in terms of intentionally voiding their system of something that could be toxic, or making them unwell.

- **It could be a way of easing nausea, gas or bloating.** Again, these conditions are related to gastrointestinal upset.
- **They may be suffering from intestinal worms.** A study conducted in wild chimpanzees suggested that they consumed plant material to increase intestinal motility and help them eliminate intestinal parasites – the same may be said for canines.
- **Dogs may eat grass to fulfill a nutritional requirement.** One study tells the story of a miniature poodle that ate grass and then vomited every day, for seven years. After placing the dog on a high-fiber diet, the dog stopped eating grass entirely.
- **It is a trait that they inherited from their ancestors.** Some people believe that because wild dogs ingested prey that had plant matter in their bowels, present-day canines seek it as well.

- **They enjoy it!** Some dogs consider it a fun and rewarding behavior, and may eat grass simply to pass time (more on this later).

What to Do if Your Dog Eats Grass Often

As I said earlier, many dogs will eat grass to make themselves vomit, but if your dog is doing this on a frequent basis it's a sign that her system may be off kilter.

In this case, you absolutely need to reevaluate their diet, as frequent gastrointestinal upset is a sign that something is wrong with the food that you're feeding.

It may be a great quality food, one your dog has been eating for years with no trouble. But if your dog begins vomiting up grass and food several times a week or even weekly, I can tell you that this is not normal.

I would recommend switching brands of food, switching flavors and switching protein sources. Above all, if you're capable of going from an entirely dead diet (kibble or canned) to an entirely living diet (raw), that would be wonderful!

You may want to seek the help of a holistic veterinarian who can help you to switch your dog to a new diet. Most importantly, if your dog has been eating the same diet for most of his life, you will need to make the transition gradually.

The other items that you should consider adding to your dog's food are probiotics and digestive enzymes. Probiotics help reseed and fortify the beneficial bacteria in your dog's gut, while the digestive enzymes provide what the entrails or the guts of their prey species would have.

These enzymes provide a rich source of amylase, lipase and protease, which can help your pets process food much more successfully.

So, that's one scenario -- the obsessive consumption of a large amount of grass in order to produce an episode of purging or vomiting. The next reason is entirely different ...

Dogs May Feed on Grass Simply Because They Want To

Contrast the first scenario -- your dog rushing out and eating any and all grass in sight -- with this second scenario: you let your dog out the back door. It looks like he's having a great time running around when all of a sudden you see him on a mission. He is sniffing and specifically seeking out tall, broad grasses -- the tall grasses that typically grow along a fence line or up from sidewalk cracks.

Your dog is very selectively picking out certain grasses. He identifies them and uses his front teeth to nibble and eat them. He's not frantic, he is doing it almost with intention and you see him select a few grasses and go about his way.

That's an entirely different scenario and that's scenario number two, which means your dog is eating grass because he wants to.

Eating Grass Is a Normal Dog Behavior

Dogs know what they need to consume. And in fact, biologists have told us that all canids -- dogs and wild dogs (wolves, coyotes, dingoes, etc.) -- consume grass and it's a completely normal behavior.

So it's important to recognize that you don't have to prevent your dogs from eating grass unless you have treated grass or your grass has pesticides, herbicides, and chemicals on it.

It's obviously important that you don't allow your dogs to consume toxins when they're consuming those grasses, but if the grass is free from contaminants, you can let your dog eat away.

Grass Has Nutrients Your Dog May Need

The grasses your dog is seeking out probably contains some nutritional value that your dog is seeking. We know that grass contains an abundant source of fiber or roughage, for instance, and we know that since grass is a living green food it contains phytonutrients and is high in potassium and also chlorophyll. Grasses are also a pretty good source of digestive enzymes.

So your dog could be seeking out selective grasses to make up for one of these nutritional components that they're currently not getting in their diet.

Some dogs may also eat grass because they are under-fed, don't have access to adequate food or are just plain bored. But, in the vast majority of cases, even if your dog is well fed and well cared for, he will still selectively pick out certain grasses just for their nutritional health benefits.