

Invisible Fences; a False Sense of Security?

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Many, many people use invisible fences to keep their dog(s) in their yard, but are they being lulled into a false sense of security? Many, many dogs show up at Shelters still wearing their invisible fence collar. These dogs are the lucky ones; some dogs who escape their invisible fence are hit by cars, fall victim to a predator (2- or 4-legged) or become lost and never find their way home.

Some invisible fences have adjustable shock levels; others don't. Even if the shock level is adjustable, when the home has more than one dog, the dilemma becomes for which dog do you adjust the shock level? Individual dogs have different pain thresholds; a shock that seems mild to one may be severe to another. Older dogs and smaller dogs are more sensitive to electric shocks than younger or larger dogs. There have been reports of older dogs becoming confused, torn between something appealing outside their yard and the shock of the fence, and, as a result, incurring fatal injuries from being repeatedly shocked.

Invisible fences should never be used with a dog who has a strong prey instinct, i.e. a strong desire to chase rabbits, squirrels, etc. Dogs with strong prey instincts will break an invisible fence without even hesitating. Even dogs without a strong prey instinct, in excitement or fright (fireworks, gun shot, thunder) may bolt out of the invisible fence. Once a dog is outside the invisibly-fenced yard, they often won't return for fear of the fence's shock upon reentering the yard.

Even if an invisible fence successfully contains the dog, it doesn't prevent things from entering the yard such as: children, other dogs, other animals, kids taunting your dog and people with mal-intent. Dog thefts are on the rise. Why? Dogs can be sold to Class B dealers who in turn sell the dogs for research. Dogs that aren't suitable for research are either sold outright to the general public or abandoned. If a person is caught stealing a dog, they can just claim they found the dog running on the street.

So, what's a dog owner to do? Conventional, "visible," fences are an option. While many developments have restrictions against conventional "visible" fences, often a homeowner can apply for and receive special approval from the developer or homeowners association to install a fence. Tie-outs are an alternative. The drawback is that dogs can get hurt, even break legs, by getting tangled up in the tie-out, or by running and suddenly finding themselves at the end of the rope.

Tie-outs and conventional fencing will keep your dog in your yard. However, neither will prevent others from coming into your yard. Dogs have also been stolen while tied-out or in a conventionally-fenced yard.

The solution really is to never leave your dog outside unsupervised. Don't use your yard as a babysitter. The risks are too great. If you can't supervise your dog while he/she is outside, bring him/her inside for their own safety. Invisible fence, conventional fence or tie-out, don't be lulled into thinking your dog is safe when unsupervised in your yard. Keep a vigilant eye on your dog whenever he/she is outside.