

# What Type of Fence Should I Have for My Dog?



## **Fencing:**

In general, a solid, physical fence is a better choice than an electric fence.

Electric fences have fallen out of favor for a few reasons:

- are not impermeable- if the impetus to run through it is present (e.g. a taunting squirrel, another dog, etc.), your dog will do just that and then be “locked out”
- do not prevent wildlife, other dogs, etc. from coming into what is supposed to be a safe area for your dog. Your dog is vulnerable to attacks. We treat plenty of wounds sustained by our patients’ being attacked in their own yards
- the collars need to be adjusted as your dog grows, gains and loses weight- sadly, we see quite a few imbedded collars and neck infections each year due to these collars
- the collars need to come off at night- imagine trying to sleep while attempting to avoid being poked by prongs when you roll over or move your head
- involve teaching through punishment and pain- something we try hard to avoid in support of the human-animal bond.
- studies now show increased fear, anxiety and stress in your dog, often leading to behavior issues, increased reactivity and even aggression towards family members as these dogs try to deal with their anxiety and frustration
- are not recommended for dogs less than 6 months of age by veterinarians. So, why wait to keep your dog safe?

Your dog does not need to roam your entire property. Install a solid fence which gives your dog enough room to get a little exercise, relieve him/herself and get some fresh air. It doesn’t have to be an enormous enclosed area. Think practicality and safety. Put in a physical fence and avoid the trips to the ER or a Board-Certified Behaviorist!

## **Fear Free Happy Homes: Why You Shouldn’t Use an In-Ground Fence System**

<https://www.fearfreehappyhomes.com/why-you-shouldnt-use-an-in-ground-fence-system/>

The idea of having an open lawn—a requirement in some communities for aesthetic reasons—and still being able to keep your dog from roaming is enticing. Electric, in-ground fence systems cost less to install than traditional fencing and they may meet the requirements of your homeowners association. But the cost to your dog can be much higher. Here’s why you shouldn’t use them.

For some dogs, their main opportunity to potty and explore the outdoors is in a yard closed off by electronic containment. This type of “fence” functions by using a threat of pain. The animal learns that they will receive a shock unless they stop and move back from the boundary line. The subsequent fear, anxiety, and stress cause the animal to avoid crossing the line.

That may sound beneficial—who doesn’t want to keep their dog from leaving the safety of the yard?—but use of these fences comes with numerous downsides. Here’s what to consider before deciding to install one at your home.

**Fearful association with passersby.** Electric in-ground fences pose the possibility of unintended negative associations with people or other dogs passing by the fence line, particularly if they were present at a time when the dog received a shock. This can cause increased conflict, frustration, and fear that the dog can associate with the yard itself and/or the mere presence of people, dogs and other stimuli.

**The threat of pain is always there.** While dogs can learn to tolerate electric fences by learning to navigate within the given boundaries to avoid the associated shock, the threat of pain always remains.

**The shock must be fairly significant and painful.** To deter dogs from venturing across the boundary, the shock must be severe enough to startle and alarm them. Many electric fence companies compare the shock the dog receives to the type of static electric shock we feel when we walk across carpet and then touch a metal door handle, but to really act as a deterrent, the shock must be more substantial than that.

**They don't always contain the dog.** Some dogs choose to venture beyond the boundary line regardless of the shock, because they're so motivated and emotionally charged in that moment that what lies on the other side of the boundary is worth the momentary zap the dog may feel. In situations when an animal is highly stressed or overly excited, normal bodily responses, including perception of pain, may be momentarily dulled, enabling the dog to burst through the boundary line. Getting the dog to then willingly approach the place where they received the shock is highly unlikely, meaning once the pet is out, they're going to be more difficult to catch and bring back onto the property.

**They don't keep other animals out.** The electric fence is designed to keep a dog inside the boundary but is not designed to keep other animals or people *out* of the yard. With no physical fence present, wild animals, other dogs, or people are free to enter the dog's yard space at any time. Because there's nothing stopping a threat or perceived threat from entering the yard, the dog wearing the shock collar is essentially "trapped" in his yard with no means of escape, no matter how afraid or uncomfortable he is.

**Dogs can learn that the fence only works "sometimes."** Dogs can become wise to the fence and learn that it works only when they are wearing the collar. They can also learn to test the line and will break through in the event the system is out, such as with a bad battery or an outage in the line.

**Fear of people in the yard.** Dogs may feel some stress with people around areas where they have received warnings or shocks in the past. That's because pain creates negative emotions that can be associated with stimuli that may include the presence of people in their potty space.

**Indoor electric containment systems.** The same conflicts apply to invisible boundaries present within the home. Some families set up electric boundaries to keep the animal away from areas such as the kitchen or furniture. In these spaces, negative associations paired with people are all the more likely to be heightened and the animal's defensive response may be all the more intensified as they likely have less space to move away when feeling conflicted.

**The last word.** Fear Free advises against electric fences, as they work by using an aversive stimulus (shock) that causes fear, anxiety, and stress. Instead, Fear Free recommends putting up a physical fence or actively supervising dogs. *This article was reviewed/edited by board-certified veterinary behaviorist Dr. Kenneth Martin and/or veterinary technician specialist in behavior Debbie Martin, LVT.*

### **The Humane Society's Stance on Electric Collars:**

<https://www.humanesociety.org/resources/dog-collars>

Shock collars use electric current passing through metal contact points on the collar to give your dog an electric signal. This electric signal can range from a mild tickling sensation to a painful shock. Shock collars may be sold as training devices, although more and more companies are pulling them from the shelves. They are also used with pet containment (electronic fencing) systems. Shock collars are often misused and can create fear, anxiety and aggression in your dog toward you or other animals. While they may suppress unwanted behavior, they do not teach a dog what you would like them to do instead and therefore should not be used.

Electronic fencing uses shock collars to deliver a shock when the dog approaches the boundaries of the "fenced" area. Typically, the shock is preceded by a tone to warn the dog they are about to get shocked. While the dog will be shocked if they run out through the electronic fence, they will also be shocked when they re-enter, leading to dogs who are unlikely to return home.