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Grass Eating in Dogs

Are you mystified when you see your canine companion munching his way through the lawn? You are not alone.

When a dog chomps on a clump of grass, the consequences are usually not pretty. Within seconds after the morsels touch his mouth, the animal is usually choking on the offending blades, vomiting, and looking very unhappy. Yet, soon afterwards, the same dog will be back nibbling enthusiastically on the green stuff because, well, dogs will be dogs.

How to Explain:

If there's a single good explanation for such peculiar eating behavior, it hasn't surfaced, although several interesting and plausible theories exist.

Some animal behavior experts think that grass makes it possible for the dog to rid his stomach of something that is either indigestible or poisonous. The offending material—often just a thick liquid or a mixture of liquid with something undigested—is bound up by the grass and expelled when the grass becomes an irritant and sends the dog to vomit.

Dietary supplement

A theory popular with holistic health advocates is that the dog is merely supplementing his diet. The thinking here is that grass supplies some nutrient that modern foods have lost in processing. They also believe that, in addition to grass, the dog would probably benefit from a diet supplemented with herbs, perhaps thinking that this is closer to what dogs' wild ancestors ate. However, there is no experimental scientific evidence to substantiate this.

Many experts believe it is more likely that a grass-eating dog is seeking the roughage that certain modern pet foods, which are low in residue (meaning they are very digestible—a desirable trait given that it means less poop for us to pick up!), may lack.

Dogs, unlike cats, are not purely carnivorous. Certain wild members of the dog family—foxes, for example, will eat berries and other plant foods. There's also the possibility that a dog has instinctively chosen the grass to remedy some condition, such as the canine equivalent of a hangover.

Sense of Detection

Some behaviorists also theorize that sometimes when a dog appears to be eating grass, he may actually be running it through his mouth to use his senses to detect what animals have walked on or urinated upon the grass. In such cases, the dog will usually not attempt to swallow the grass. This seems especially common after a rain, when odors trapped in the droplets on the grass.

Salad Eater

Dogs eat many things--garbage for example--that humans do not consider palatable, so it may just be that our canine companion is eating grass because he likes the taste or wants the canine equivalent of a salad.

As for throwing up afterward, dogs being dogs, they probably don't even remember that it happened.

The bottom line is that grass eating may cause concern on the part of the dog owner, but it is usually not a problem unless accompanied by loss of appetite or more than one or two episodes of vomiting. It is important to make sure that grass itself is not chemically tainted. Chemically treated lawns and roadsides sprayed with weed killer are obviously to be avoided.

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