

5 Do's and Don'ts When Buying a Bark Collar

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The term "bark collar" refers to an electronic collar that produces an electrical shock to the neck or other part of a dog's body from a remote device. They are also called "training collars" or "shock collars." The term "shock" is a bit of an exaggeration, as the tingling sensation they produce is actually similar to static electricity experienced when contacting metal objects. They are primarily used today as way to modify behavior and improve obedience, with a wide range of service applications, as well. As an alternative to electrical shock, some types produce sounds, vibrations, or even citronella spray. More recent advances include a GPS feature to locate a missing pet.

The use of these devices stirs quite a bit of controversy today. Many pet organizations are actively trying to reduce or eliminate their use. A few countries have banned them outright. However, there is ample evidence in favor of the safety and effectiveness of bark collars. It is imperative that anyone considering one for their dog be apprised of the pros and cons.

This guide will present some of the current applications for bark collars. It will present the issues both for and against their use. It will list which elements to look for when buying one and how to use one that is safe for both the pet and owner. There will be a list of what to do and not to do when using bark collars and the guide will offer some suggestions on how to quickly find bark collars to purchase.

Common Uses

Originally developed as a barking deterrent, the uses for bark collars have widened over the years. The companies that produce bark collars now market them to include all sorts of training tactics, in addition to their very common use as a means of providing a way to keep an outdoor dog from wandering away from the home.

Control Barking

The use of collars as a deterrent to excessive barking has led to the development of humane and effective devices. Some collars rely on the sound of the dog barking to create a response from the collar and some use vibrations from the vocal cords. The most effective types require both elements to reduce incidents of "false alarms" created by noise other than barking.

Some collars can be set to only deliver a shock, sound, or vibration when the handler activates them as an alternative to the automatic setting that generates a response with all barking. In this way, the dog can be trained that barking when someone unknown approaches the property is acceptable, but barking otherwise is not.

The upside to either is that bark collars can be a very effective means of controlling unwanted barking. Critics argue that they are cruel under virtually all circumstances and often result in negatively altering the dog's temperament towards aggressive or timid behavior.

Containment

One of the primary uses of bark collars has nothing to do with barking. They are used with buried perimeter wiring, also known as an invisible or underground fence to deter dogs from leaving a specifically defined property area. Since many homeowner's associations and local ordinances forbid the use of fences, these systems have increased in popularity in recent years. The perimeter wire carries no electrical current. It works in conjunction with a circuit box, and provides a closed loop to the circuit. Whenever the collar approaches the buried line, it responds with an electrical pulse or other sensory mechanism. Containment collars can also be used indoors to deter a dog from entering specific portions of a home.

Behavior Modification

Bark collars can be an effective way to condition certain positive animal behaviors. The most common is that they provide an effective method of off-leash training. Training collars can also be used as a way to prevent dogs from chasing other animals or getting too near dangerous ones, such as snakes. They are a terrific tool for teaching hunting dogs to drop the prey at their master's feet and not to harm it during capture and retrieval. Other service uses include seeing-eye dogs, sled dogs, and dogs used for law enforcement.

Bark Collar Features

A wide range of features is available for most bark collars today. Some collars are not available for very small dogs. Others may only offer one level of response. Before purchasing any bark collar, confirm that it offers the features you want. The following table lists the most common bark collar elements and options:

Feature	Options	Decision Basis
Type	Vibration, ultrasonic, shock	Temperament of dog
Power Supply	Rechargeable, standard battery, proprietary battery	Hours per day of use
Bark Sensor	Vibration, sound, dual	Cost
Levels	Range from one to 10	Cost
Dog Size	Range from five to 40 pounds or more	Age of dog
Adaptation	Smart, progressive, none	Cost
Other	Multiple dog capacity, timer, bark odometer, reservoir indicator	Living situation, dog temperament

The range of features and options for bark collars is wide and expanding. Check different manufacturers and their recent upgrades prior to purchase.

Bark Collar Types

Bark collars are available in various styles ranging from those that respond with vibration, a beeping sound, or a slight electrical pulse. Some collars have a single mode and others incorporate more than one.

Vibration

As the name suggests, a vibration option collar begins to vibrate when it detects barking. The response is much like the vibrate mode on a cell phone. The vibration mode is distinct from the vibration activation feature that activates many collars. There is much disagreement about the effectiveness of the vibration option. It clearly works better on short-haired dogs where the contact is closer to the animal's skin.

Ultrasonic

Ultrasonic collars that utilize sound as a deterrent deliver a high-pitched screech that is quite uncomfortable to a dog's sensitive hearing. This setting is usually adjustable, to minimize the collar's response to common nearby sounds other than barking. Those who dislike electrical pulse collars are more forgiving of the sound variety, as they are less harsh. One of the prime disadvantages is that any other dog nearby will also activate the sound. Additionally, dogs can become conditioned to the sound and learn to ignore it over time.

Pulse

The pulse style delivers a mild electrical shock when it detects either barking sound or vocal cord vibration. Some of these shock collars begin with a mild response that increases with continued barking. Critics of that type believe that they encourage the initial barking and confuse the dog. Most of these devices enable the pet owner to set the collar for a fixed response. Ultimately, testing conclusively demonstrates that pulse or shock collars are the most effective. It isn't long before the dog learns not to bark and the collar then essentially functions as a reminder, not a delivery system for punishment.

Citronella

Citronella collars are activated in the same ways as other devices, but spray a light mist around the animal's face when activated. Both the mist itself and the unpleasant lingering smell provide a deterrence to barking. Citronella collars are

most effective for timid dogs with a light to moderate barking response. More aggressive dogs quickly learn that they can empty the contents of the collar with repetitive barking. These collars are less durable and require more maintenance than other types. The price of the canisters to refill the collar can also add up quickly. However, some critics of other types are more forgiving of this gentler intervention.

5 Bark Collar Do's

For those who decide to purchase a bark collar for their dog, follow this list of considerations to ensure the best results:

Ensure the Collar is Comfortable: Make sure the collar is comfortable, especially if it is to be worn all the time. Learn which collar is the most comfortable and least likely to aggravate the dog. No collar will work if the dog will not willingly tolerate its use.

Buy Collars with Temperament in Mind: Realize that each dog is unique and will respond differently to various stimuli. If the dog is relatively calm and restrained, something less than an electrical jolt may suffice.

Match Features to the Environment: Confirm that the collar is a good match for the dog. Consider the dog's size, age, and environment. Remember that ultrasonic collars can have an effect on other dogs in the house.

Read Product Review on Collars: Every company should provide a website that enables people to read the reviews of other buyers. Many will provide testimonials, which may or may not be legitimate. A better source is the eCommerce websites that aggregate a large number of sellers and offer unbiased reviews of each product.

Compare Prices Online Against Local Stores: Local pet shops and veterinarians will typically price their collars higher than the online options. They also tend to promote a particular brand above others to improve their profit margins or reduce specific inventory.

5 Bark Collar Don'ts

The following list will provide some specifics to avoid when searching for bark collars:

Avoid Sound Only Collars: The uses for these collars are extremely limited. In city environments there are too many external sounds that can set off the collar, leading to fear, anxiety, and increased aggression.

Avoid Single Level Settings: Most collars that only provide one level of response are more extreme than necessary. Look for a collar with a range of at least five settings and begin with the lowest one.

Acclimate the Dog Gradually: Start with a short wearing time, until the dog becomes accustomed to the collar. Many people make the mistake of rushing the training period and end up discouraging the dog or otherwise changing its behavior and personality.

Determine the Specific Bark Collar Need: It is a mistake to attempt to cure all ills with the same medicine. If the purpose of the bark collar is to prevent incessant barking, don't try to use it for perimeter containment as well. The dog will quickly become confused and may turn either timid or aggressive.

Beware of Proprietary Batteries: Most professionals recommend against buying bark collars that require the use of a specific battery that can only be purchased from the collar manufacturer. These batteries can be very expensive and may offer more limited life than typical batteries. Additionally, if the manufacturer ceases operations, it may be impossible to find replacements.

Conclusion

Since there are now so many varieties of dog bark collars available, with a wide array of options, many pet owners choose to put these decisions into the hands of professional trainers. The pros have the required training to determine which type of collar will be most effective, given the temperament and age of a specific dog. Of course, that can be an expensive option for those with limited means.

The better solution for most people is to spend some time online with unbiased opinions from others who have already used the product. This is the best way to determine which collar is best for each circumstance. It is where to learn about any collar performance issue, warranty coverage, and product liability concern. Read several guides and confirm that the collar and dog are properly matched.