




*Does a dog in the driveway  
keep the bad guys away?*



Everyone knows that a dog is a man's best friend, but these days many of us prefer friends with benefits - especially ones who can defend us. Threatened by crime, we turn to our canine companions for protection. We hope that trespassers will think twice about climbing the fence around our homes if there is a large dog on the other side. Or we count on a little yapper in the bedroom to warn us that there is a villain nearby.

## AROUND THE HOUSE

Can we really rely on our furry friends to safeguard our properties? Or is the idea of a canine superhero just a shaggy dog story? And what do we owe our pets in return? MARKtoe! spoke to those in the know to bring you the facts on dogs and security.

### Size counts when scaring off scoundrels

Yes, dogs can keep the bad guys out, according to Dr. Michelle Lawrence, a veterinarian at Grabouw Animal Clinic, but a lot depends on the type of dog.

"If you have two German shepherds and the neighbour down the road has none, the criminal will rather pick the neighbour's house," says Doc Michelle. She adds that, in her experience, black dogs with yellow eyes are most feared. And size counts: big beasts are better deterrents than little lapdogs.

*"I don't think it's fair to leave one dog on its own outside," she says. And according to her, a pair will offer a much more potent defense than a lone dog.*

Nonetheless, she acknowledges that smaller breeds can play a vital role. She believes that some large dog breeds need a buddy to keep them on their toes. Boerboels and bullmastiffs are sound sleepers, making a Jack Russell a useful partner. A bark from Jack will wake both Boel and owner. Dogs also need company. "I don't think it's fair to leave one dog on its own outside," she says. And according to her, a pair will offer a much more potent defense than a lone dog.



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Michelle keeps her own dogs indoors, but she says keeping dogs outside is fine as long as they have access to a warm shelter and enough water. A large dog can drink two or more liters per day, depending on the weather.

Malicious poisoning by criminals seems uncommon in the Western Cape compared to other areas of the country and she's not had to deal with such instances.



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### Your best friend can't be pals with the enemy

Michelle stresses the importance of a relationship between the dog and its owner. If you leave the care of your canine to staff, your animal will offer you no protection against an inside job – after all, you cannot expect the dog to bite the hand that feeds it.

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"You have to build a relationship with your dog," agrees Jacques van Nieuwholtz, operational manager at Specialised Agri Protection Services. "You have to spend time with it, walk together, play together, praising the animal when it does the things you want it to do."





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Jacques is a specialist in training and handling security and sniffer dogs. He has firsthand experience of the power of dogs. "If there are trained dogs on the property, criminals tend to avoid the premises."

However, he cautions owners to decide up-front whether they want a pet or a protector. A dog raised as a pet, conditioned to be everyone's friend, is set up for failure as a guard dog. Crooks easily win over these congenial canines when they prepare an attack on your home.

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"You want your dog to be watchful during times when you are not," he continues. He explains that an effective watchdog is one that can see off an intruder, not one that quickly makes friends with strangers.

Jacques also recognises a role for small dogs. He keeps his two German shepherds outside to take care of the bad guys and a couple of dachshunds indoors for raising the alarm.

The welfare of security dogs is of paramount importance. He stresses that dogs need a dry, sheltered place to sleep. Dog beds should be raised off the ground and kennels must be large enough to allow free movement. Hygiene is essential and requires doing regular rounds with the poop scoop. He also recommends that water bowls be washed daily.

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## AROUND THE HOUSE

Jacques is quick to point out that dogs also want mental stimulation. A neglected, bored dog is more likely to get into trouble, digging holes or chewing hosepipes. Keeping two dogs often helps, but this doesn't absolve owners from spending quality time with their friends and protectors.



### Having dog on site when you contract a security company

"Dogs can be a very effective deterrent to criminals," affirms George Rautenbach, training manager at Fidelity ADT, a leading security company. He describes getting to know different dogs while growing up on a farm. "The Rhodesian Ridgeback or Boerboel breeds are quite protective of their owners and are territorial, which provides the homeowner with excellent protection. Inside the home, the Maltese poodle and Jack Russell breeds are very effective watchdogs."

"Remember that the criminal's biggest weapon is the element of surprise," he adds. "Dogs neutralise that because they are alert and hear better than humans." It can happen that your faithful friend hinders security instead of helping it. "Vicious dogs can be a real problem for the security personnel," he explains. "We have had a couple of incidents where reaction officers have been injured by watchdogs when responding to alarm activations."

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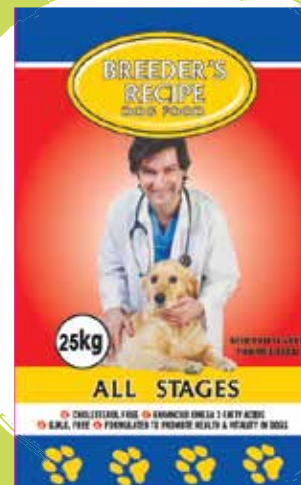
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Property owners should inform security companies if they have any aggressive dogs. In some cases, cranky canines may prevent reaction officers from entering the property. Security service providers prioritise the safety of both responders and pets. Jacques explains that all their reaction officers undergo dog awareness training. They also carry pepper spray and a baton as the first line of defense against dog attacks. Officers even wear trousers designed to resist dog bites.

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Dogs sometimes complicate security further by setting off alarms as more people have beams to detect intruders installed around their homes. Jacques explains that there are units designed to differentiate between canines and crooks, which will prevent property owners from having sleepless nights due to false alarms set off by pets. Similarly, pets that are active at night may activate passive motion sensors inside your house, but you can ask your security company to adjust these to a setting that your dogs won't trigger.

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### Saving your money and saving your life

The experts agree that criminals think twice about entering a property where dogs are present. The bigger the dog and the better it is trained, the greater the deterrent advantage. However, keeping dogs is a serious commitment with a hefty price tag. Besides beds, bowls, toys and other accessories, big dogs have big appetites. Throw in tick and flea control, deworming and visits to the veterinarian for vaccinations and you may start to wonder if a burglary wouldn't be less expensive.

But as it turns out, your canine companion could be saving you money even if he never stops a criminal. By analysing data on claims, insurance companies have found that dogs reduce the risk of burglary and some insurers now inquire about dog ownership when issuing policies. "We take the ownership and the size of the dogs into account when determining premiums," confirms Natasha Kawulesar, Head of Client Relations at OUTsurance.

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When you consider that dog owners live longer, that bag of food suddenly seems like a better deal. Research has shown that dog owners have a lower risk of cardiovascular disease and suffer fewer heart attacks and strokes. Taking your pet pal for many walks is a contributory factor, but the company of a furry friend also helps by reducing stress. These benefits are even greater for people who live alone. So, if you haven't found your forever-hound yet, the time is now. After all, a dog can keep you company, keep you safe and keep you sane. Isn't that exactly what best friends are for? 🐾



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