

ROOM TO RUN

These days, a big backyard isn't a given for all dog owners. Inner-city dwellers are taking their puppy pals to designated spaces in parks, beaches and camping grounds.

WORDS JESSICA GOULBURN

Summer is often a time to spend with family – days spent lazing by the pool, frolicking in the water or on the sand, or playing sport in the park. But it's often our pup that gets left by the wayside.

As housing trends change and people move away from the big backyard, it becomes even more important to take your dog outside to open spaces. Not only will your dog benefit from the exercise and socialisation, you will too.

The environment in which we live, work and play forms a crucial aspect in shaping our lives and behaviour. Physical activity, and that of our dogs, can often be influenced by the quality and quantity of open spaces in which to play.

Why the need for public open space?

Exercising your dog provides a whole range of benefits. While any exercise is definitely good exercise for your pup, variety is best. This means on-leash walks or runs, running and playing with other dogs off-leash, and playing with you.

Clover Moore, Lord Mayor, City of Sydney, actively promotes and encourages dog owners to get outside and get active with their dogs. "Dogs connect people with their local communities by getting them out and about in their neighbourhoods. That's why we provide open spaces where people can exercise their pets off-leash," she says. "We know that this improves the behaviour and temperament of the animals and promotes social engagement and more healthy lifestyles for owners."

Thirty years ago, taking your dog out to the park for a run around was a lot easier to do. The growing population of New South Wales, teamed with people moving into smaller homes, means it's even more important to plan for dogs and their owners in public spaces.

Virginia Jackson is a town planner who has been involved in animal management policy for many years, developing guidelines for the integration of dogs and their owners in public open space. She says that there are several reasons why planning for dogs in open space is so valuable.

For the dog, there are an abundance of benefits that off-leash areas provide, including the all-important socialisation process. "A dog can be exercised when it's on the leash, but they get really good exercise when they're off the leash," Virginia explains. "For some dogs, they really need that because they need the exercise to be even better behaved at home." →

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The places to be

Around New South Wales, there are plenty of dog-friendly public open spaces for you to enjoy the outdoors with your dog. Many inner-city parks have designated off-leash areas. "More than 40 parks already include off-leash areas, and whenever a park is upgraded we look into the possibility of including space to have dogs off-leash," Clover says. There are several beaches along the coastline that allow dogs to roam the sand and take a dip outside of peak hours.

More and more people are renting or buying apartments in the city or inner city suburbs, which means they need plenty of open space to take their furry friends. Even though it's an off-leash area, it's important to remember that your pup still has to be under the effective control of a competent person. This means your dog must be able to respond to your commands.

1 The park

Hawthorne Canal Reserve in Sydney's Leichhardt is renowned for not only its dog-friendly off-leash areas, but also for its dog-friendly cafe. Sitting on the border between Leichhardt and Haberfield, the reserve has plenty of space for your pup to run, play and meet other dogs. It's also a wide-open space for you to enjoy together, playing Frisbee, fetch or just going for a run. There is an on-leash area of course, if you prefer to run with your dog on the leash.

Hawthorne Canal Reserve is a great place for your dog to socialise and play with others, and to learn obedience. With all the distractions around it, your dog must learn to respond to your commands and to play appropriately with other dogs. It's all part of the socialisation process.

There's also a place for you to relax and enjoy a cup of coffee or some food while your dog has a play. Café Bones even offers a puppacino for your pooch, which the owner describes as a lactose-free drink with a secret sprinkle.

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2 The beach

If the beach is more your thing, why not take your pup along so it can have a swim too, and get some sun of course. Just north of the Harbour Bridge, Sirius Cove in Mosman allows dogs to roam the sand and take a dip at all times during the week. However, on the weekend, dogs are only allowed before 9:00am and after 4:00pm. Soft sand running is great exercise for you, and your pup will love the feeling of sand under its paws.

The water is calm as the beach is on the harbour, so if you have a small dog, it won't be swamped by waves. There are also barbecue facilities for your use and a playground for the kids. Just remember to give your dog a good wash before you pop it in the car, as there's bound to be sand all over it.

3 The camp ground

If you fancy a stay-over with your pooch over summer, camping is always a great option. Maca's Camping Ground in Mullumbimby, northern New South Wales, is the perfect place to spend a night, or several. Sites are available for long or short stays and powered sites are an option if you need electricity. A family-friendly camping park, dogs are allowed off-leash at all times, however, they must be controllable and relatively quiet.

Maca's is family run and set in a quiet, rustic area. Bush tracks surround the site so you can keep up your fitness routine with your dog. However, remember to put your dog on its leash as there is a lot of wildlife about.



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