

# INVISIBLE FENCING AND THE TIBETAN MASTIFF

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*"Fences are made for those who cannot fly."*

*Author: Elbert Hubbard*

p.s. Some TMs can fly



A major part of responsible dog ownership is to know exactly what you are getting into with the Tibetan Mastiff breed and knowing responsible ways to address common TM behavior. First and foremost, it seems that breeders must over-emphasize to newcomers that the Tibetan Mastiff is a **guardian** breed and that the guardian nature is a built-in feature. It surprises many prospective owners to hear that even 2-3 week old puppies will growl and bark should someone unexpectedly enter the whelping area or wake little ones from a nap. The guardian behavior is an instinctive one and already in place by the time you get your puppy. As your Tibetan Mastiff matures he will only take his job of patrolling and guarding your property and home more and more seriously.

## **The Question of Fencing**

While it should be stated from the start that there are breeders out there who will sell to *anyone*, many breeders feel the need to thoroughly screen prospective owners. And one of the first questions that potential owners may be asked is whether or not there will be a proper and secure containment area provided for a Tibetan Mastiff puppy. Applicants will be asked to write about and/or discuss the various aspects of a traditionally fenced-in yard.

- How large is the fenced area?
- What material is the fence made from? Is it wood, wire, or chain link?
- How high is the fencing?

All of these factors are quite important and failure to have proper fencing may mean that the breeder will not consider placing a Tibetan Mastiff in this home.

In the minds of many prospective owners, however, there may be an alternate fencing solution that they want to discuss.

## **Electric Fencing and How it Works**

Underground electrical fencing has been around since the 1970s thanks to Richard Peck and the premise of how it works is simple enough. To keep the fencing hidden, electrical cable is buried in a narrow trench that extends around the perimeter of the designated dog yard. This wire is then attached to a control unit and turned on. Each and every dog that has access to the yard must be fitted with a transmitter that is attached to the dog's collar. When the dog approaches the boundaries of the yard, a warning beep sounds and the dog is "warned" away from the hidden fencing. Should the dog venture too close, however, he is "shocked" or "zapped."

The arguments that prospective owners use for invisible fencing usually fall into 3 categories. The first issue that prospective owners want to discuss has to do with the price tag of traditional fencing. They simply can't afford the initial cost of fencing in an entire yard.

The second line of reasoning in favor of invisible fencing is that these people have had other breeds before and this type of fencing system worked just fine. The training of the previous or current family pet took a relatively short period of time and the pet "never" or "hardly ever" left the property.

The remaining point of view has to do with the fact that these people live in an area where erecting a traditional fence is prohibited, too difficult because of terrain or simply an eyesore. The obvious solution seems to lie with such products as Innotek, Dogwatch or Invisible Fence by PetSafe since these hidden fencing systems cover anywhere from ¼ of an acre to over 20 acres and are relatively easy to install. That kind of coverage without unsightly above-ground fencing plus the promise of all that "freedom" at a relatively inexpensive cost seems like the ultimate solution.

## **Is Invisible/Underground/Electronic Fencing an Option?**

*It is the opinion of the Tibetan Mastiff Breeders Response Network that invisible/underground/electric/radio fencing ON ITS OWN is NOT a proper containment solution for the Tibetan Mastiff breed.*

## **The Breeder's Perspective**

In response to these arguments, breeders do acknowledge that, in certain circumstances, invisible fencing does have its merits. Some "trainable" breeds seem to do well with electric fencing when owners take the time to train their pets to respect their property boundaries. Breeders also recognize that providing secure fencing is an expensive endeavor and invisible fencing does seem to give the most value for the buck when it comes to yard coverage. As it pertains to the Tibetan Mastiff, however, it would seem that all the benefits and advantages of this kind of fencing rest with the owner. The dog is usually the one that must suffer from any disadvantages. Here are some reasons why many Tibetan Mastiff breeders do not feel that owners can depend on the safety of an invisible fence.

## **Ignoring the "No Trespassing" Sign**

One of the most valid cases against invisible fencing is that it does not prevent strangers or other animals from wandering on to the property. Because they are not wearing the necessary transmitter to warn them away, the list of unwanted trespassers can range from children or adults to stray or wild animals to other free-roaming neighborhood pets. Now please remember again that we are discussing a guardian breed. Under the best of circumstances, the situation will be chaotic and, at its worst, be devastating as the Tibetan Mastiff does his job to protect and defend should anyone or anything intrude upon his territory.

## Ignoring the Boundaries

The typical Tibetan Mastiff is notorious for his ability to be an expert escape artist but did you also know that the breed is renowned for single-mindedness, high prey drive, stubbornness, and high pain threshold? Whether he is excited to high activity by seeing a neighborhood child, stray cat, the UPS driver, or desperately wanting to be with his owner, a Tibetan Mastiff can suddenly explode into guardian mode. Excited and stimulated by the typical adrenaline rush while on high alert or driven by his guardian instincts, a TM may forget his boundaries and ignore the warning beeps sent to the collar transmitter. He may be repeatedly shocked as he runs the length of the fence in frustration and aggression or he may simply barge his way right through the invisible barrier.

The chances of an escaped dog returning through the electric fencing are unlikely as he will soon make the connection that he will be shocked again. Owners may now have a panicked and confused dog wandering loose on busy streets. If an owner is lucky enough, his Tibetan Mastiff will be found uninjured and returned home none the worse for wear but there is always the chance that the dog may attack some animal or person out of fear, be killed in traffic, attacked by other dogs or lost forever.

*\*\*Let it be stated that, by definition, a ONE-TIME escape constitutes a failed containment solution. If a dog has managed to escape the invisible fenced area (or any other type of fenced area), he has found that system's weak spot and steps need to be taken to ensure that it does not happen again.\*\**

## Other Things To Consider

There are other common scenarios to take into consideration in determining the reliability of electric underground fencing for a Tibetan Mastiff.

- Dogs don't automatically know and respect electric fencing. It takes a great deal of time and commitment to train a dog to learn the boundaries of his yard. This extensive training requires that an owner shock his dog intentionally.
- Just as humans are individuals, so are Tibetan Mastiffs. While there is a general "norm" for the breed, there are TMs that are extremely sensitive, easily stressed, timid, improperly socialized or aggressive. During the required commitment to boundary training, no one can predict how these dogs will react to their owners purposefully shocking them during their training sessions. Nor can anyone predict how a Tibetan Mastiff will interpret or associate the shock he receives with the stimulus on the other side of the invisible fence, be it bike riders, roller bladers or the paperboy. It is not impossible to think that he may associate frustration, pain and aggression with people.
- The Tibetan Mastiff is a double-coated breed and the collar that provides the shock correction has prongs that need to be in contact with the skin of your dog. Failure to shave your dog's fur in those areas, especially during the winter months, will probably mean that the device will not work.
- Without back-up, a power failure or a dead battery in the dog's collar means that he is allowed to leave the property. Wire/collar malfunctions may mean that a dog can experience electrical burns or repeated shocks.
- Many of the fencing companies do offer support should your dog escape from the yard but that support comes in terms of technical advice. Generally, the companies do not concern themselves with dog behavior or specialize in dog training. In order to prevent escapes, suggestions may include turning up the shock value or doubling up on the collars. Most breeders don't want to even think about the consequences of putting a TM through this added trauma.

- Some Tibetan Mastiffs may have physical disabilities such as hearing/sight impairments that could make it difficult for them to hear the warning beeps or recognize the visual markers that indicate the invisible boundaries.
- Invisible fencing does not protect dogs from vehicular accidents should one decide to include the driveway as part of the fenced area. Potential accidents may occur as dogs are then free to lie in driveways or they will have access to strangers that pull their cars onto the property.
- For those in northern regions that receive a lot of snow, the amount of snow drift or the height of shoveled banks may affect the performance of the electric fencing.
- While it may seem unlikely to happen to a fully mature Tibetan Mastiff, it is not unheard of that your TM puppy can be taken off your property if left unattended without the benefit of locked gates or the obstacle of physical barricades.

### **The Benefits of Electric Fencing**

While it is true that traditional fencing is not escape-proof, it is a solid visible obstacle that presents as a physical deterrent to your dog and others. Perhaps then we see the greatest benefits of electrical fencing when it is used in conjunction with traditional fencing to help ensure secure yards. Working together, both containment systems may prevent escape artists from finding their way off your property. Or, should traditional fencing be compromised in some way, for example by ill repair or storm damage, your dog may still not find his way out. An added advantage to electric fencing is that it can “move” with you and your dog should you relocate.

Simply put, the cons of underground fencing far outweigh the pros where the Tibetan Mastiff is concerned. Please seriously consider whether or not your yard situation is suitable before adding a TM to your family.