

# Diggin' dog parks

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By [MARY ANN ALBRIGHT](#) - COLUMBIAN STAFF WRITER

Dog parks aren't just about giving your pooch the chance to run, leap, play and socialize. Dogs exercise different muscles playing in a dog park than they do going for a walk on a leash.

"It's like cross-training for your dog," said Lisa Peterson, spokeswoman for the American Kennel Club.

But not all dog parks are created equal. Amenities, size and settings vary.

When it comes to size, Clark County leads the pack.

There are about 15 fully fenced dog parks in Clark County and the greater Portland area. The largest, at about 8 acres each, are Ross Off-Leash Park in Vancouver and the soon-to-be-opened Pacific Community Park just outside east Vancouver.

In the future even more off-leash options will be available in Clark County. The Dog Owners Group for Park Access in Washington (DOGPAW) is working with the county to develop an additional dog park in Brush Prairie near the Center for Agricultural Science and Environmental Education on Northeast 149th Street, and the group plans to start construction this fall. Additional sites near Vancouver Lake Park and the Clark County Event Center at the Fairgrounds are being explored.

I recently took my Cavalier King Charles Spaniel Sophie to the area's largest fully fenced dog parks to see how they rate.

I used the American Kennel Club's criteria, which maintain that an ideal dog park needs a double-gated entrance to prevent escapes and should provide at least 1 acre of space surrounded by a chain-link fence at least 4 feet tall.

Parks also should have covered garbage cans, adequate drainage, grass that's mowed regularly, "pooper scooper" stations with waste bags, shade, water, benches and tables. Dog parks should offer easy access to adequate parking, and patrons shouldn't have to cross traffic to get from their car to the park. Signs stating park rules and hours should be clearly posted.

A separate area for small dogs also is helpful, since they can get intimidated or injured playing with larger, heavier dogs.

## Petiquette

Avoid faux pas by following these rules and tips:

- Dog parks are for canines only. Leave cats and other pets at home.
- Dogs less than 4 months of age, female dogs in heat and sick dogs should not be taken to dog parks.

- Dogs must be kept on their leashes when entering and exiting designated off-leash areas.
- Dogs showing any signs of aggression should be removed from the dog park.
- Dogs shouldn't be allowed to jump on people .
- Pick up your dog's waste and dispose of it in a trash receptacle. If poop bags aren't provided at the park, be sure to bring your own.
- Don't let your dog dig. If digging does occur, fill in any resulting holes.
- Don't litter.
- Don't smoke.
- Make sure your dog is licensed and current on vaccinations.
- Work with your veterinarian to find appropriate flea and tick, intestinal worm and heartworm prevention treatments. Check for fleas and ticks after visiting a dog park.
- Do not leave your dog unattended at the park or let him or her wander out of sight.
- Make sure your dog is wearing a collar and identification tag. Consider fitting your dog with a microchip as an additional safety measure. Microchips provide permanent identification should your pet get lost.

## WHICH PARKS ARE WORTH THE MOST BARKS?

Using the American Kennel Club's criteria for the ideal dog park, here's how Columbian reporter Mary Ann Albright and her Cavalier King Charles -Spaniel Sophie rated the area's six largest fully fenced dog parks: Reason for paws? The Columbian grades area dog parks.

### Park ratings guide

No paws: Take me home

One paw: Barely better than the backyard

Two paw: Decent doggie social club

Three paw: My tail won't stop wagging

Four paw: Leader of the pack

### Ross Off-Leash Park

Where: Northeast Ross Street and 18th Avenue, Vancouver.

When: 7 a.m. to dusk daily.

Why: This 8-acre park, which is part of the Bonneville Power Administration's Ross Complex just south of Hazel Dell, was created and paid for by members of DOGPAW and is maintained by volunteers. The park is set on a hill, and dogs and owners get a workout following trails leading from the upper entrance at Northeast 18th Avenue to the base of the enclosure. Benches are sprinkled throughout the property in case people need to rest their feet.

DOGPAW recently designated about 1/2 of an acre for dogs less than 25 pounds and 16 inches tall. To access this area, use the lower entrance at Northeast 15th Avenue. There is ample parking in the C-Tran lot across the street from the small dog area. The downside of this lot is that owners and their dogs have to cross a somewhat busy street to get to the park. There's also a smaller parking lot at the upper entrance

that provides more direct access to the park.

Ross Off-Leash Park provides covered trash bins and bags for picking up after pets. The water source recently was shut off.

The fields are surrounded by

4-foot chain-link and wire fences. Both entrances have double gates.

Power lines dominate the surrounding area, detracting from the park's natural beauty. Still, the sheer volume of space and commitment of volunteers to protect and maintain the park compensate for any eyesores.

Ross Off-Leash Park recently tied with Hondo Dog Park in Hillsboro, Ore., for top user rating on portlandpooch.com, a Web site for local dog lovers.

Anyone can use the park, but DOGPAW members get to vote on development and management. Dues help pay for upkeep. A one-year individual membership is \$15, and a family membership is \$25.

Information: [clarkdogpaw.org](http://clarkdogpaw.org).

Rating: Three-and-a-half paws

### Pacific Community Park.

Where: Northeast 18th Street between 164th and 172nd avenues, Vancouver.

When: 7 a.m. to dusk daily starting July 1.

Why: When this dog park opens, it will be about as big as Ross Off-Leash Park - 8 acres.

There will be double-gated entrances off two parking lots for easy access to the dog park. Planned amenities include a dog agility course and two canine bubbling water fountains, as well as a gravel trail running throughout the enclosure. Covered garbage cans and poop bags will be provided. There are no plans for a separate small dog area.

The dog park is encircled by a 4-foot chain-link fence. There are restrooms, picnic tables and benches located just outside the off-leash area.

As with Ross Off-Leash Park, the surroundings somewhat taint the natural beauty at Pacific Community Park. The dog park is bordered by Northeast 164th Avenue, which is a fairly busy street. Also, power lines dominate the horizon.

Pacific Community Park is being developed by the county in coordination with Vancouver-Clark Parks and Recreation Department. DOGPAW will help maintain the off-leash area.

The dog portion of the park will be named the Dakota Memorial Off-Leash Area in honor of the Vancouver police dog killed in the line of duty last year. A dedication ceremony is scheduled for Aug. 2.

Information: [cityofvancouver.us/parks-recreation](http://cityofvancouver.us/parks-recreation).

Rating: Too soon to tell

### Fisher-Mill Plain (Vandervort) Park

Where: Northeast 172nd Avenue and Fifth Street, Vancouver.

When: 7 a.m. to dusk daily through the end of the day July 6.

Why: This no-frills 5 1/2-acre site tides over dogs and owners until Pacific Community Park opens. The temporary site has attracted a loyal following, in part because of the many lush trees peppering the park. They provide shade during warm weather and shelter from the rain.

The ground in this park is a bit uneven, and the grass was in need of mowing the day of my visit. Despite

signs prohibiting digging, holes present a trip hazard.

The park doesn't offer a separate small dog area, drinking fountains, benches, picnic tables or restrooms, but it has the basics. Covered garbage cans and poop bags are provided.

Fisher-Mill Plain Park meets the American Kennel Club's suggested safety standards. The space has a double-gated entrance and is surrounded by a 4-foot chain-link and wire fence.

The site also scores points for convenient parking. Visitors can park at Laurelwood Baptist Church at Northeast 172nd Avenue and Sixth Street. The church has designated specific spots in its lot for dog park patrons.

Information: [cityofvancouver.us/parks-recreation](http://cityofvancouver.us/parks-recreation).

Rating: Two-and-a-half paws

## Chimney Park

Where: 9360 N. Columbia Blvd., Portland.

When: 5 a.m. to midnight daily.

Why: This 5 1/2-acre space has two off-leash areas where dogs can play. In one, the grass is kept short. In the other, it's left to grow wild in places, giving pooches a different type of terrain to explore. The park is fairly forested and well maintained. Although Columbia Boulevard is a busy street, the park has a tranquil feel. A 4-foot chain-link and wire fence delineates the off-leash area.

Trails meander throughout the property, giving owners a chance to exercise while their dogs play. The park also offers picnic tables, benches, chairs, poop bags, garbage cans, water bowls and limited agility equipment.

There is a parking lot directly off the park, as well as a portable potty.

There's no separate small dog area, and the entrances don't have double gates. The gates don't latch, and one patron said his beagles have escaped before.

Information: [portlandonline.com/parks](http://portlandonline.com/parks).

Rating: Two paws

## Hondo Dog Park

Where: Northwest Evergreen Parkway and 229th Avenue, Hillsboro, Ore.

When: Dawn to dusk daily, closed Monday and Thursday mornings until noon for maintenance.

Why: This 3 3/4-acre space is the Ritz-Carlton of dog parks. It has perfectly manicured lawns, a spacious area for small and timid dogs, a sandy section for winter use and doggie water fountains. Benches, picnic tables and brightly painted fire hydrants dot the park, part of which is set on a gentle hill. The entire space is enclosed by a 4-foot chain-link fence, and all entrances are double-gated. There's convenient parking and a portable potty located just outside the off-leash area.

The only downside to the park is the distance. Even in light traffic it takes about 30 minutes to get to Hondo Dog Park from downtown Vancouver. And with gas prices being so high, many people might prefer to exercise their dogs closer to home.

Hondo Dog Park was nominated for Dog Fancy magazine and DogChannel.com's national dog park award this year. It also recently tied with Ross Off-Leash Park for top user rating on [portlandpooch.com](http://portlandpooch.com), and was voted No. 1 dog park in the Vancouver-Portland area in a recent Spot Magazine survey.

Information: [hillsborodogs.com](http://hillsborodogs.com).

Rating: Four paws

## Delta Park

Where: North Union Court and Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, Portland.

When: 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily.

Why: This off-leash area is 3 1/2 acres and offers ample shady trees and greenery. It's also relatively uncrowded, except when sporting events are happening in the park. There isn't a separate small dog space and entrances aren't double-gated.

The gates don't latch, which is especially worrisome because the off-leash area is bordered by busy streets. One patron said he's seen dogs use their noses to push open the gates and escape. The space is enclosed by a 4-foot wire fence, but the barrier looks flimsy in places. The grass is overgrown.

Traffic from Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard is loud, so it can be difficult to carry on a conversation in the dog park. There isn't a parking lot adjacent to the off-leash area. People either park on the side of the road or across the street at the sports complex.

On the plus side, the dog park does provide poop bags, garbage cans, a picnic table, benches and a couple bowls people can fill with water they bring from home. This park was ranked fourth in a recent Spot Magazine survey.

Information: [portlandonline.com/parks](http://portlandonline.com/parks).

Rating: One paw

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## Other fenced dog parks in the Vancouver-Portland area

- » Ash Street Park, 12770 S.W. Ash Ave., Tigard, Ore.
- » Banfield, The Pet Hospital Dog Park, 8000 N.E. Tillamook St., Portland.\*
- » Brentwood Park, Southeast 60th Avenue and Duke Street, Portland.
- » Gabriel Park, Southwest 45th Avenue and Vermont Street, Portland.
- » Happy Valley City Park, 13770 S.E. Ridgecrest Road, Happy Valley, Ore.
- » Hazeldale Park, Southwest 196th Avenue north of Farmington Road, Beaverton, Ore.
- » Memorial Park, 8100 S.W. Memorial Drive, Wilsonville, Ore.
- » Normandale Park, Northeast 57th Avenue and Halsey Street, Portland.
- » North Clackamas Park, 5440 S.E. Kellogg Creek Drive, Milwaukie, Ore.
- » Potso Dog Park, near the intersection of Southwest Wall and Hunziker streets, Tigard, Ore.
- » Summerlake Park, 11450 S.W. Winterlake Drive, Tigard, Ore.

SOURCES: [ci.wilsonville.or.us](http://ci.wilsonville.or.us), [portlandonline.com/parks](http://portlandonline.com/parks), [tigard-or.gov/community/parks](http://tigard-or.gov/community/parks), [co.clackamas.or.us/ncprd](http://co.clackamas.or.us/ncprd), [www.thprd.org/parks](http://www.thprd.org/parks), [ci.happy-valley.or.us](http://ci.happy-valley.or.us), [ci.wilsonville.or.us](http://ci.wilsonville.or.us) and Banfield, The Pet Hospital.

\* Pet owners must apply for park membership prior to use. Membership is free. For more information visit the main Banfield office at 8000 N.E. Tillamook St., Portland, or call 503-922-5000.

ON the Web: To view an interactive map of fenced dog parks in our area and watch videos of what the

area's six largest parks are like to visit go to [columbian.com/lifehome/pets](http://www.columbian.com/lifehome/pets) .

<http://www.columbian.com/article/20080629/LIVING/728460660>