

CO-EXISTING WITH SKUNKS

Are Skunks A Problem?

It is best to leave skunks alone because they tend to do more good than harm. It is also a waste of time to trap and remove skunks because you will end up with more than when you started!

HOW DO THEY BENEFIT MANKIND?

Primarily by eating many home and farm pests (including: mice, rats, gophers, moles, aphids, grubs, beetles, yellow jackets, grasshoppers, cutworms, rattlesnakes, black widow spiders, cockroaches, snails, etc.)

PREVENTIVE MEASURES:

If skunks around a house or farm are a problem, some simple preventive measures can be taken to discourage them. These involve removing sources of food and shelter from an area, which can attract skunks.

Remove brush piles, stacked lumber, woodpiles, and similar sources of shelter which skunks can find inviting.

Dog or cat food left outside for family pets or feral animals can be very attractive to skunks.

Discontinue this practice if skunks are a problem. When it is necessary to feed pets outside, train them to eat in 5-10 minutes by taking their food away (they learn real fast to eat in that time or they don't get fed!) and/or feed on a picnic table in a tray or heavy ceramic bowl (although this doesn't solve the problem of spotted skunks, raccoons, opossums, rats, mice, cockroaches, coyotes, etc. that DO climb). Striped skunks don't climb table legs or jump. (Don't forget to move the benches away.)

If you have avocado or fruit trees, pick up the fallen food daily to keep rodents, roaches, and the wild animals away. Wild animals are also attracted to the rodents and insects that eat the fruit.

Compost heaps also lure all these critters. Keep your compost area as far away from your home as possible.

Block openings, which lead under structures such as houses, decks, and porches to prevent skunks from making homes there. You can use a sturdy wire mesh (1/4-inch hardware cloth or similar material) to screen such openings. Bury the covering a foot below ground to prevent skunks from digging underneath. Remember, anything that you can pull off, wild animals can also.

Be careful not to lock skunks or other animals inside!

A fence can exclude skunks from landscaped areas, schoolyards, etc. 1-inch poultry netting in a 3-foot width is recommended. The bottom 12 inches should be buried below ground extending at least 6 inches down and 6 inches outward in an "L" shape to discourage skunks from digging under it.

REPELLANTS:

This is a method, which is recommended by Jerry Baker, 'Master Gardener':

Mix 8 oz. lemon-scented dish washing liquid with 8 oz. castor oil (mix well) into 1 gallon of water.

Spray this mixture on your entire yard. (If a skunk is living in the yard, spray the yard at night and thus after the skunk has probably left in search of food.) A good way to apply this mixture wasn't mentioned to me but I guess it can be applied using the same technique used for liquid fertilizers, pesticides, and weed killers.

Sprinkling human hair all around the yard was also suggested. You can also buy zoo poo or collect coyote scat and sprinkle it around to scare off wild animals.

Notice! Do not use mothballs and moth flakes and pans of ammonia! They have been recommended at times to drive away skunks...BUT these rarely work, are toxic to not only animals, but the environment and yourself, and many people think these smells are worse than skunk smell.

SPECIFIC PROBLEMS:

Because skunks wander from place to place there is a good chance that a skunk living under the house won't be there any more than a few days.

Skunks only stay in one place for a long time when they are mostly inactive during the winter. Young skunks may remain in a den while a mother searches for food during spring and summer months.

Sometimes, however, one skunk may be under a home one day and a different skunk moves in the next, thus you may have an ongoing skunk problem if entrances aren't sealed.

SKUNKS UNDER A BUILDING:

This is one of the most common problems: If a skunk is under a building, it is best to wait until after dark and let the skunk leave by itself to seek food. Tracks at a den entrance will indicate that the animal has left. After it has left footprints going out (and not back in) spread out smooth flour inside the hole before you close it off. If you suspect that a skunk still remains, you will see footprints in that flour when you reopen the covering.

If you're not sure how many skunks are present, you can keep each skunk out as it leaves by making a one-way door. Such a door can be made by attaching a section of 1/2" hardware cloth (or similar material) to the opening, which is hinged at the top and left loose on the other three sides. It should be larger than the opening so it cannot swing inward. This will let skunks leave but won't let them re-enter. (I personally think they are ingenious enough to get back in. There are better one-way doors that you can buy or build.)

Setting up a bright light near the entrance may discourage a skunk from returning to a den. Some have also recommended noise such as a radio (talk shows especially...'human sounds') but I don't know how well this works. I recommend rap music!

When the skunks are gone, seal up the entrance securely as described above. You can seal up a dug hole with dirt or concrete but you should also include the wire mesh near the area anyway. I've seen skunks re-open old dens, which are poorly sealed. I suspect skunks can smell when an area has been recently occupied and may desire to re-open such areas.) A barrier can also include a wire skirt at ground level extending at least 12 inches outward.

Skunks usually mate in January through March. Gestation is about 63 days making most skunks born in late April - early May. (In CA they are born as early as mid-March, and during the El Nino in 1998, as early as mid-February!)

Skunks are weaned in about 6-7 weeks. NOTICE: Young skunks may remain in the den from late April to early August Again, be sure all babies are out before sealing entrance!

SKUNK IN WINDOW WELL, CELLAR, OR HOLE IN GROUND:

Carefully lower a cleated board, or covered with a nailed-on towel, into the hole to allow the skunk to climb out and escape. (This year I had one that still couldn't get out of a 3-foot deep window well, so I

very slowly lowered a towel inside being sure to keep from being seen, and when close enough, I grabbed it by the base of the tail, being sure to point the rear away from me, picked it up and placed it where it could run off.)

SKUNK IN POND OR SWIMMING POOL:

Secure a towel at the edge of the pool so it can climb out. Wearing gloves, I simply lift the skunk by the base of the tail and set it down to quickly run away.

EXCLUDING SKUNKS FROM BEEHIVES:

Skunks will eat bees and damage beehives. I've read that they're apparently not bothered by bee stings (or any other venoms).

Take a scrap of plywood or board about 1-foot square and drive nails through it spaced 1 inch apart (2-inch long nails of any type will do). The result is a pincushion arrangement, which can be placed on the ground beneath the entrance to the hive to discourage skunks.

A SKUNK IN YOUR HOUSE?

Keep your pet doors, sliding and garage doors closed from dusk to dawn. Make sure there is no food that is accessible to skunks any time of the day while these doors are open.

I know of several cases where different species of wild animals have actually snuck up in bed with people for warmth, much to their dismay when they discovered that "soft feeling" on their bare foot was not their Fluffy or Fido!!

If they are already inside, slowly and quietly close off doors to the rest of the house, lock up your dog if you have one, shut off the light in the room that contains the skunk (it will probably be hiding), and turn on the light outside the door where a little bit of food awaits the skunk. Be sure to smooth out a layer of flour so you can see the footprints going out only, then keep your door closed from now on.

TRAPPING:

I hesitate to give trapping information because it shouldn't be done and rarely solves the problem. If you must remove a skunk that accidentally got in a trap, as long as you are "slow" and "quiet" and "non-threatening", you will not get sprayed. Hold a large old towel in front of your body and watch for the skunk's signals. If it stamps the ground furiously, just stop until it relaxes, then continue.

SHOOTING:

Shooting skunks is NOT a recommended way to get rid of them. It often results in release of their odor. Also not recommended if the skunk needs to be captured for rabies testing.