



SKUNKS

A skunk's individual territory may span 30 to 40 acres. They are hardly ever found more than two miles from a water source. In urban territories, skunks den beneath buildings, decks, dumps, and woodpiles. They are capable of burrowing a den a foot or so underground, with well-hidden entrances. They like warm, dry, dark, and defensible areas; most house basements and crawl spaces qualify.

Skunks are generally nocturnal and begin foraging at sunset. Skunks are omnivorous and help keep the rodent population in check. They often travel five to ten miles within their territory at night looking for field mice and other small rodents as well as lizards, frogs, birds, eggs, garbage, and fallen fruit.

Skunks also dig for insects, especially beetles, larvae, and earthworms. Their diet includes black widow spiders and scorpions. Being carrion eaters, they help keep roadways and neighborhoods clean. An estimated 70 percent of a skunk's diet consists of insects considered harmful to humans.

Having adapted well to neighborhoods, it is not uncommon to find skunks and domestic cats dining peacefully together. There have been cases of skunks entering homes through pet doors, dining with the family cat and finding a quiet closet or empty bed to spend the night. As long as the skunk does not feel threatened, it won't spray.

Skunks rarely attack unless cornered or defending their young. If approached by an intruder and unable to flee, a skunk will usually fluff its fur, shake its tail, stamp the ground with its front feet, growl, stand on its hind legs, turn its head and spit to scare the potential attacker. If those techniques do not work, it will lift up its tail and spray.





TIPS

1. Do not feed the skunks. They can easily become dependent on human food sources.
2. Never leave pet food outside.
3. Never discard edible garbage where skunks can get it.
4. Secure garbage containers and eliminate their odors. Use a small amount of ammonia or cayenne pepper in the garbage to discourage scavenging.
5. A persistent, faint skunk odor around a hole leading under a foundation or deck indicates a skunk may be present. To find out, cover the hole with loose dirt; if a skunk is in residence, it will dig out during the night. Allow three days for the test; if dirt remains undisturbed, then close the opening with masonry, boards, or hardware cloth.
6. Place mothball-filled socks and/or sprinkle cayenne pepper around your yard to discourage digging.
7. Start a nontoxic insect-control program (especially for grubs) to discourage digging.
8. Fences are effective as long as they are buried at least 1-½ feet in the ground.
9. If a skunk strays into your garage, leave a door to the outside open and let the skunk exit on its own.
10. Debris and brush piles should be removed or stacked neatly to eliminate suitable cavities.
11. Blow-up or plastic great horned owls may be strategically placed and periodically moved to deter skunks.
12. Keep pet doors closed at night to prevent illegal entry by a skunk.
13. Keep fruit trees picked and don't leave rotted fruit on the ground.
14. Restrict use of birdseed. Skunks are attracted to it and to the birds and rodents that use the feeder.
15. If possible, eliminate outdoor sources of water.





Sprayed by Skunks

If a person or an animal surprises a skunk in a situation where neither can retreat, the skunk will spray in self-defense.

Skunk spray in human eyes is extremely irritating and can cause temporary blindness, but no permanent damage. Flush eyes liberally with cold water to ease irritation. Wash skin with carboloc soap and water, tomato juice, or vinegar. You may be able to save clothing by washing repeatedly in vinegar water and/or hanging it outside for a month or so before dry-cleaning. For the worst sprays, however, it may be best to discard or burn the clothing.

When your pet is sprayed, the quicker you take action, the more completely you can remove the odor. Wash your pet with tomato juice or diluted vinegar to counteract the chemical makeup of the skunk spray. Skunk Off and similar preparations containing neutrolem alpha, available from some pet stores, are effective.

Skunk Smell Remedy: 1 quart 3% peroxide, ¼ c baking soda, 1 tbsp liquid hands soap. Mix all three ingredients together. Shampoo animal thoroughly, keeping out of eyes, nose, and mouth. Soak 5 minutes, rinse well.

Information provided by California Center for Wildlife and the Fund for Animals.

