

Problems with skunks



Skunks are primarily active at dawn, dusk, and at night but can be active during the daytime, particularly in human-use areas. They den in tree cavities, underground burrows made by other animals, and human-made structures such as chimneys, basements, spaces under patios and between walls. Breeding usually occurs during February and March for the striped skunk; gestation time is about 9 weeks and litters range from 4 to 6 kits. After 2 to 3 months, the kits can be seen following their mother as she makes her nightly rounds in search of food.

Skunks consume a highly-varied diet including insects, grubs, earthworms, small rodents, snakes, lizards, frogs, mushrooms, berries and fruit, pet food, and garbage. It is not good to feed wildlife, either intentionally or unintentionally. Don't leave pet food outside at night, keep ripe fruit picked, keep garbage cans securely covered or inside a garage at night.

Wildlife cannot be relocated. A territory left open by removing an animal will be quickly filled by another. It is also illegal in California to relocate animals or to raise them as pets.

Under house

Find the entrance, usually a loose vent cover or a hole they dug to get under the foundation wall. Wait until the skunk comes out, and then securely close the hole. Make sure there are no babies still under the house. If there are babies under the house, leave the hole open and make the area unpleasant by lights and noise (with flashlight and radio). The mother will move her babies to another nest site and you can then safely close the hole. Sprinkle flour or cornstarch on the ground around the opening so you can more easily check for footprints to see if the skunk has come out. The combination of lights and noise is very effective. Give it at least a week to work. It may take a couple of days for the mother to get annoyed, a couple of days to find a new home and some time to move the babies.

Under deck

Screen the area under the deck using welded wire or other strong material. Leave one opening, and then close it securely after it comes out. Make sure there are no babies still under the deck. Sprinkle flour or cornstarch on the ground around the opening so you can more easily check for footprints to see if the raccoon has come out.

Eating pet food

Don't leave pet food outside at night. Feed pets indoors or put food outside only during the daytime. Pet food should be stored indoors or in a secure metal container.

Coming into the house

Close the door. If coming through a pet door, close the pet door.

Getting into garbage can

Fasten garbage can lids securely. Rope or chain should work. To prevent toppling of the can, place the can in some kind of anchored rack or tie it to the fence. Keep the can in the garage. Use repellent on and around the can.

Digging in lawn

The skunks are hunting for grubs and worms. Treat your lawn for grubs (insect larvae that eat grass roots) at the

beginning of the summer so there will be no food available in late summer and fall when the raccoons are most likely to dig in lawns. Beneficial nematodes are a good non-toxic way to kill the grubs; see your nursery for advice. Skunks will usually stop digging in lawns at the start of the rainy season.

- Sprinkle the lawn with finely ground black pepper or cayenne pepper.
- Use dog and cat repellent around the perimeter of the lawn and the perimeter of the yard to keep skunks away from the lawn.
- Cover the lawn with welded wire so skunks cannot dig into it. The lawn will grow up through the wire, and will become hidden very shortly. It's okay to mow over the wire.
- Make sure skunks are not living on your property (under house, etc.).
- Use a light with a motion detector.
- Use a radio playing a talk show throughout the night.
- Use an infrared/motion detector-activated sprinkler to spray animals with water.
- Fence the yard with electric fencing.
- Water the lawn less to make the soil less soft and easy to dig in for food.

Eating produce from the garden

Fence the garden with a flimsy chicken wire fence that won't support the skunk's weight. Install an electric fence. Keep ripe produce picked. Use dog and cat repellent around the perimeter of the garden.

Using ammonia as repellent

Soak cotton balls with ammonia, place cotton balls in small bowl. Don't block entrance with ammonia. Do not use if there are babies.

Using dog/cat repellent

Not all skunks respond to repellent in the same way. Initially, use lots in a wide area.

Out during the day

If a skunk is acting normally, it is probably OK. Striped skunks are primarily active at dawn, dusk, and at night but can be active during the daytime. If a skunk is acting abnormally or appears ill, call your local animal services.

In California, skunks are one of the carriers of rabies along with bats, a viral disease transmitted by the bite of an infected animal. Skunks can also be carriers of other diseases including leptospirosis, listeriosis, canine distemper, canine hepatitis, Q-fever, and tularemia.

For Questions or assistance with Skunk Problems

Contact Alameda County Vector Control Services District at (510) 567-6800 or www.avcsd.org