

SKUNK CONTROL

The striped skunk, *Mephitis mephitis*, is found throughout Illinois. Though they avoid people, they frequently come into conflict with humans. Being a member of the weasel family, they are well equipped with a powerful scent gland that can shoot an acrid and foul-smelling liquid as far as 6 to 10 feet away. Though skunks are often not well liked, they are beneficial since they consume large quantities of destructive insects and mice. However, when they burrow under a structure, venture inside, or come into direct contact with people, they cannot be tolerated.

Biology

Skunks are about the size of an adult house cat. Striped skunks are black, generally with two white stripes extending down the back. Skunks are nocturnal, hunting at night for insects, small rodents, mushrooms, berries, pet food, and garbage. They also love eggs and will readily raid any bird nests they find.



Skunks usually breed in the spring and, after nine weeks of gestation, give birth to four to six young (kits). They don't hibernate, but they will seek shelter from colder weather in dens, hollow logs, and under porches and buildings. Skunks are frequent carriers of rabies and other diseases such as leptospirosis, listeriosis, Q-fever, canine distemper, canine hepatitis, and tularemia.

Management

Skunk control is best achieved by removal and relocation, exclusion, or destruction—in that order. Only pest management professionals should conduct any removal or destruction of skunk infestations.

Homeowners can help prevent skunk problems by exclusion methods. Properly constructed foundations will prevent skunks from digging beneath buildings. Openings that are already present should be screened with ¼-inch hardware cloth to prevent skunks from gaining access. Also, cut back overgrown shrubbery to eliminate cover.

Make sure garbage cans have tight-fitting lids.

Skunks often dig for grubs (immature beetles), leaving conical holes 2 to 3 inches across and about as deep. Removal of these grubs is beneficial. However, the holes can be unsightly on golf courses and residential lawns. Yards that are fertilized and watered throughout the summer tend to have more grubs and provide good feeding areas for skunks.

Using an approved pesticide that kills the grubs usually solves the problem by sending the skunks somewhere else to look for food. Finally, uneaten food placed outdoors for pets should be removed by nightfall.

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