

Skunk Got You In A Funk? Try These Tips

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — If it looks like someone rototilled a circle on your lawn last night, don't assume you have a strange neighbor. It may be the neighborhood skunk, says a wildlife biologist in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences.

"Skunks often come into yards to root around for grubs," said Gary San Julian, professor of wildlife resources. "They also get under houses, decks, and sheds. We all know the problem with skunks — if they get scared or you harass them, they spray a very disagreeable odor. This odor is extremely difficult to remove."

Skunk damage is easily differentiated from that of dogs and squirrels because skunks tend to tear up patches in the grass as they search for grubs, San Julian explained. Skunks also have tracks with five toes — although the fifth may be hard to see. Skunk droppings are one to two-inches long, ¼- to ½-inch wide, and often contain parts of insects, skunks' preferred food.

"A skunky odor alone doesn't mean a skunk's still in the vicinity," San Julian said. "A dog, cat, or other animal may have been sprayed." Depending on wind direction, experts say skunks can spray up to six, 12, or 18-feet.

San Julian said the best way to deal with a pesky skunk is to live-trap and move it. No pesticides are registered for use with skunks, and you need to be extremely careful when using fumigants, he said.

"Chicken entrails, sardines, peanut butter or fishy cat food all make good bait," he said. "Cover the trap with canvas or

dark plastic to make it dark inside. This probably makes the skunk feel more secure, and it can't see what's going on. Once you've trapped the skunk, slowly, quietly move the trap at least 10 miles to a suitable habitat where it won't harass another landowner. Set the trap down gently and open the door.

"You probably won't get sprayed while trapping," San Julian said, "because the skunk won't have enough room inside the trap to lift its tail."

People in Pennsylvania need a trapping license to hunt or trap skunks, unless they are damaging property, San Julian said. "Call your local game commission employee or wildlife conservation officer and tell them what you want to do."

If you don't want to get that intimate with a skunk, San Julian suggests calling a wildlife damage control specialist. Your county Penn State Cooperative Extension office keeps lists of specialists registered with the game commission.

To prevent skunks from making dens under houses, sheds or decks, San Julian suggests sealing up potential entries. "Sprinkle flour in front of the holes and watch for footprints leaving the area to make sure the skunk is out from under the house," he said. "Skunks aren't much larger than a small cat and can slip through three- or four-inch spaces."

Skunks are dormant for about one month during the coldest part of the winter. They breed from late February to late March. "You're most likely to run into skunks right before the sun comes up and at dusk," San Julian said. "If you get sprayed,

you probably want to destroy your clothes. Burn, bury, or get rid of them.

Although tomato juice works fairly well, the following new solution washes away "eau de skunk" and other odors. In an open container, mix one quart three percent hydrogen peroxide, ¼ cup baking soda, and one teaspoon liquid soap.

"Spray it several times on walls, structures, your dog or yourself, then wash it out," San Julian said. "Don't store this solution — use it all up. Hydrogen peroxide and baking soda mixed together produce a gas that can explode in a container."

If left alone, San Julian said that skunks are peaceful and play an important role in the ecosystem by controlling insects and rodents. They're also fun to watch.

But beware: like foxes, raccoons and bats, skunks can carry rabies. "Rabies has reached epidemic proportions in the northeast in the past 20 years," San Julian said. "Because skunks are nocturnal, they usually stay out of sight during the day. If you see a skunk acting strangely in the daytime, or acting aggressively and coming towards you, stay away from it. Call your local wildlife conservation officer. If you find it necessary to destroy the animal, make sure the head is intact because the brain is needed to determine if the animal is rabid. This is particularly important if someone has been bitten."

For more information, see the College of Agricultural Sciences' fact sheet, "Wildlife Damage Control 11: Skunks." Single copies are available free of charge by contacting your county Penn State Cooperative Extension office, by calling the College of Agricultural Sciences Publications Distribution Center at (814) 865-6713, or by down-

USDA Announces Pork Checkoff Procedures

LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.) — Kathryn Heil, county farm service agency (FSA) executive director, announced final procedures and dates for the upcoming referendum on continuation of the pork checkoff program. U.S. Ag Secretary Dan Glickman authorized a vote on continuation of the checkoff program in February.

The congressionally mandated pork checkoff program is funded by assessments collected from producers when hogs are sold. The funds are used for pork promotion, research, and consumer information. Program funds cannot be used to affect the outcome of the referendum vote.

The final referendum rules provide for in-person voting Sept. 19-21, at the Lancaster County FSA Office, located in

the Farm and Home Center, 1383 Arcadia Road, Lancaster.

Absentee ballots may be requested beginning Aug. 1. However, absentee ballots for producers will become available from the Lancaster County FSA Office from Aug. 18 through Sept. 18.

The public is invited to observe the counting of the ballots at the Lancaster County FSA Office on Nov. 29, 2000 at 1 p.m.

Producers who have owned and sold one or more pigs or hogs at any time from Aug. 18, 1999 through Aug. 17, 2000 are eligible to vote. Producers are to vote in the county office where the producer's farm records are administratively located or, for other producers, in the county where the producer owns hogs or pigs. The final rule will be published in the Federal Register July 13.

New York State Week Aug. 6-12

SYRACUSE, N.Y. — The Farmers' Market Federation of New York announces New York State Farmers' Market Week, Aug. 6-12, as sponsored by Sen. Nancy Lorraine Hoffman and adopted by the New York State Senate.

This honor shows that New York State recognizes the value of farmers' markets to the state's economy, to the agricultural community, and to the local neighborhoods.

The Central New York Region loading a copy from the College of Agricultural Science's publication Web Site at <http://pubs.cas.psu.edu/>.

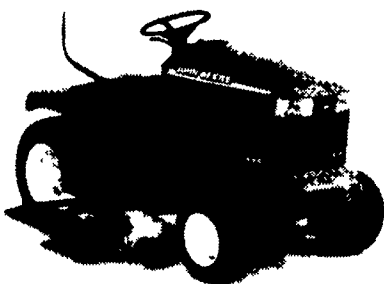
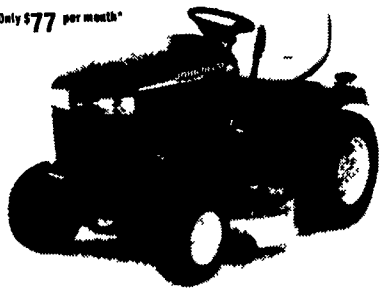
gional Market in Syracuse will be hosting Huck Finn Days Aug. 12-13. There will be frog jumping contests and other activities relating to the Mark Twain novel. There will even be special visits by Huck Finn and Becky Thatcher! And if car racing is your thing, Corning's Market Street Farmers' Market will be combining their Farmers' Market Week festivities with NASCAR Week events.

To find a farmers' market in your area, visit the farmers' market web site at www.nyfarmersmarket.com or call the Farmers' Market Federation of New York's office at (315) 475-1101.

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