



Skunk Damage

Skunks dig up the turf looking for grubs. They move around at night and dig in grassy areas, making distinct 3- to 4-inch deep holes. Skunk activity increases in the spring and then lessens naturally, so any problems may stop all on their own. ... Of course, skunk spray is a common sign of damage.

Both the cat-sized striped skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*) and the smaller spotted skunk (*Spilogale gracilis*) can create problems in lawns. Skunks are drawn to residential areas because food, water and shelter are readily available. These animals are particularly troublesome in urban and suburban areas, as they can carry rabies and other diseases, produce a powerfully pungent spray and damage lawns and gardens while searching for food.

Recognizing Skunk Activity

Skunks are nocturnal, so you may not see them damaging your lawn. Barking dogs and the telltale skunk odor are often the first indication of a skunk's presence. In lawns, skunks dig small, cone-shaped holes measuring about 3 to 5 inches across or upturn patches of earth. Unlike other animals, skunks dig circular holes. Like raccoons, skunks can also peel back sod to look for grubs and other insects.

About Skunks

Skunks feed on grubs, insects, frogs, snakes, bird and pet food, garbage, eggs, fruits and berries. The home range of a skunk is usually 1/2 to 1 1/2 square miles although in late winter and early spring breeding males can travel 4 to 5 miles in a night. Skunks generally make their dens in burrows but dig as little as possible and instead prefer to occupy burrows abandoned by ground squirrels or other animals, brush piles, hollow logs or spaces under decks or porches. Den entrances are usually about 3 to 4 inches in diameter and have a little grass growing in front of the opening.

Lawn Grub Management

Because skunk damage to lawns results from this animal's digging for grubs and other insects, controlling the grubs can reduce skunk presence. Keeping the lawn healthy by choosing the most appropriate turf species for the site, watering the turf deeply and infrequently, mowing the grass at the correct height for the species and occasionally dethatching and aerating the lawn will help to maintain turf vigor and limit insect pests. Digging up or cutting beneath the thatch and inspecting the soil around grass roots is the best way to spot grubs and other larvae. Where you observe these pests, try to identify the species and choose and apply an insecticide labeled for its control. Certain species of beneficial nematodes can control grubs and other soil-dwelling grass pests.

Excluding Skunks and Other Controls

Stack wood piles tightly, clear brush piles, cut back overgrown shrubs and cover large pipe ends and openings around buildings or porches with wire mesh buried 1 foot deep to prevent the skunks building dens. Keep garbage tightly covered, do not keep pet food and water outside and remove fallen fruit to avoid attracting foraging skunks. Some city or county governments may provide help to control skunks in residential areas. Skunks are fairly easy to trap using an enclosed plastic trap or wire cage trap covered halfway with a blanket and baited with sardines, cat food, peanut butter or apples. Once a skunk is trapped in a wire cage, approach it quietly and cover it the rest of the way with the blanket. Skunks, more comfortable in the dark, are less likely to spray if they are covered and transported gently. An animal shelter, pest control specialist or your municipality may dispose of a trapped skunk. Check your local laws before doing anything to control skunks.