

Backyard Visitor

By Steve B. Davis

"We have a skunk living in our yard."

"What!?" my wife said.

"We have a skunk, you know one of those animals with the white strip down its back that emits a vile scent, and in fact can pass it on to someone else," I said.

Last winter I noticed an absence of cats visiting my yard. Usually the neighborhood cats all stopped by to check out the menu of garbage on our deck. In winter I pile the bags on the deck until it's time to move them to the back alley. I figure they will freeze and won't smell. With that said, the cats still come around to check it out. Their sense of smell is obviously better than mine.

One evening I opened the patio door and put out a bag on the deck, when I slid the door closed I noticed a scurrying movement on the deck. I peered out and to my astonishment a cute little creature came up to the glass door and eyeballed me. This was definitely not a cat. I've seen enough forest creatures in my time to know this was a skunk. It exhibited a complete lack of fear, and seemed to want to make friends. After a few minutes it sauntered off into the night.

A couple of days later on my way to work through the backyard, who should I encounter, but my little friend. He or she, I don't know, took one look at me and dashed under the kids' playhouse. So now I knew where it lived. These meetings continued all winter on a frequent basis. I made lots of noise before entering the backyard to give warning so I wouldn't be on the receiving end of its defense mechanism. I didn't want to end up living in the kids' playhouse for a week.

We had a daytime nanny for our children. She walked over in the morning from a couple blocks away. Most mornings she short cut through the backyard. One morning she came into the backyard and ended up face to face with our striped friend. The nanny screamed, the skunk stared at her; decided fear was the better part of valor, and scampered under the playhouse. Needless to say the nanny started taking the long way around to our front door.

At last to protect all concerned we decided to ask the city to rid us of our visitor. A call to city authorities revealed they don't do skunks. We had to trap it ourselves or pay someone to do it at a cost of a couple of hundred dollars. One firm I phoned told me I could do it myself.

"Get a cage, put some food inside, and in the morning see if the skunk is inside," he said.

"Then what do I do?" I asked.

"Throw a blanket over the cage, put it in your car, drive out to the country, and release it," he said.

"Let me get this straight," I said. "The skunk is in the cage, extremely irate, looking to take its anger out on someone, and I'm supposed to walk up and cover it with a blanket. Forgive me if I'm a little skeptical, but I think I might have to live outside if I try that."

"Don't be a wuss. Do it quick. It shouldn't be a problem," he said.

"That's very reassuring. I'll think about it. Thanks a lot," I said.

Pondering this course of action, it didn't take me long to conclude, I sure wasn't going to do it. My eight year-old son volunteered, but I didn't want him to live outside either, besides he wanted to keep it in his room as a pet. That was not an option.

In the end, the purchase of some garbage cans, solved the problem. I placed these outside my backyard fence in the alley and made sure all the garbage bags went in them, not on the deck. Bottom line I removed the skunk's nightly buffet. Our morning meetings ceased a few mornings after the breakfast bar closed.

This disappointed my son who had made space for the skunk in his room. He couldn't understand why I wouldn't invite such a cute critter into our house to be part of the family.

© 2010 Steve B. Davis