

## ASK CYNTHIA: Reader Requests



Dear Cynthia

We are having a problem with skunks coming in the backyard and eating our plants and cat food. Sometimes they spray and it's awful. Any solution? Thanks for your help.

Susan, Orinda

Dear Susan:

Sounds like you have a smelly problem! Skunks are scavengers that invite themselves to dine wherever they smell food. They will dig in a garden for insects and they'll eat plants, too, but I believe they are coming for the cat food. First thing to do is to remove any pet food and batten down the garbage cans. Clients have used mothballs placed around the perimeter of a yard to keep the small critters away, but I personally have not had success with this method. Normally once you remove the food source, you control the problem unless they are truly attracted to your delicious garden.

The more urgent concern with skunks is the possibility of encountering a rabid animal. Vector control encourages homeowners with a skunk issue to contact them for trapping and removal. They will lend a trap to you for a first visit. You place the trap with food inside at the place where the skunks are visiting. When you've captured the skunk you call them and they arrive within 24 hours to euthanize it. To contact Vector Control in Contra Costa County, call (925) 685-9301 or visit [www.ccmvcd.dst.ca.us](http://www.ccmvcd.dst.ca.us). If you have continued problems, it is recommended that you buy a trap. I ordered mine through The Snare Shop. They are called Super Tuff Trap #6, cost approximately \$50 each plus shipping and are humane ways to catch squirrels, cats, opossums, or any small critter. This company has snares for bears and mountain lions, too. Hope you don't need those! Go to [www.snareshop.com](http://www.snareshop.com).

Keep lots of tomato juice on hand until you've solved this stinky scenario.

## ASK CYNTHIA: Reader Requests

Hello Cynthia:

I enjoy reading your column in the *Lamorinda Weekly*. I have a very vexing problem that hopefully you might be willing to help me solve. I have a planting bed that is lamentably overrun by oxalis. It is also oozing out into my lawn. I just can't seem to eradicate it. Short of removing the top four inches of soil in my planter, do you have any magic solution? I have tried letting the planting area go fallow and then spraying it with various poisons the nursery people have suggested but no luck killing it. Any suggestions from you would be much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Joy from Lafayette



Hello Joy:

As we all know, a weed is just a flower growing where we don't want it. Oxalis, a South African invasive, is one of those plants that people either love or hate. I have clients in Los Angeles who planted a lawn of oxalis and clover and are thrilled with the results. They never have to mow, they get flowers in winter, and their dog loves playing and rolling in its lushness.

Oxalis goes by many names including creeping wood sorrel, Bermuda buttercup, sour grass, good luck plant, and my personal favorite, Shamrock or lucky clover. The genus name Oxalis is derived from the Greek word meaning "sour." Oxalic acid in the plants is sour tasting and the plant is generally considered poisonous although eating small amounts of the nutrient rich leaves, tubers, flowers, and seeds are not considered dangerous when consumed raw. But I digress—obviously you are not interested in eating your Oxalis!

Getting rid of Oxalis can indeed be difficult yet not impossible. It sounds like you've exhausted the expert advice from your garden centers. You can pull out oxalis easily for a season but it will be back blanketing your garden with yellow blooms when not much else is flowering. I've had clients use a mixer of equal amounts of dishwashing detergent, water, and vinegar to drench the new shoots with some satisfaction. Spraying must be done the moment you see even one plant emerge. Diligence is required. If you are not opposed to the use of chemicals when all else fails, Weed Be Gone has a special oxalis product and Roundup is effective. I'm not advocating these methods, but it's good to have options. Removing all the dirt in your planter and replacing with topsoil, mulch, and a pre-emergent are possibilities, but you will still have to be on patrol to eradicate any seedlings that sprout. You said it's "oozing out into your lawn." Make sure you clean the mower blades or you'll have my Los Angeles clients' lawn, too.

Here's my very magic potion—get a few chickens and let them free range. Chickens love eating oxalis and they are fairly excellent at getting to those teeny tiny tubers that are almost invisible to the naked eye. With chickens your oxalis will be gone forever, your garden will be treated with free fertilizer and you'll have organic, delicious eggs.

Here's hoping you put the "joy" back into your planter and enjoy some "egg-citement" as well.

Cynthia Brian

The Goddess Gardener

[Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com](mailto:Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com)

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*Cynthia will answer questions when space permits.*

*Email your comments or questions to [Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com](mailto:Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com)*