

Of skunks, heat and crickets

By Arthur O. Tucker

During this past summer, we picked up some great tips that I wished that I had known before.

First off, our new male cat was apparently intimidated by the three female cats already in the household and proceeded to mark his territory. Outside in the garden, washing with the hose, and, in really odorous areas, bleach worked well.

We absolutely love Patches (a.k.a. Love Sponge), but the urine on the mattress left us infuriated. We tried everything on the market and several homemade concoctions.

Finally we read a recommendation in "National Wildlife" to eliminate skunk odor: 1 quart 3 percent hydrogen peroxide mixed with 1/4 cup baking soda and 1 teaspoon Dawn liquid dish soap. It worked!

Now we're ready for the next time, but Patches has finally found his place in the household and has stopped his marking.

Then, I was at a horticultural conference, and I was complaining to Ms. Susan Wood, an artist from Texas, that it was just too hot to garden. She replied, "Well, I use modern technology." She bought a huge fan (think "tornado") on wheels from her local building supply store and an extra-long extension cord. Then, in her swimming suit with a garden hose, she proceeds to garden.

I immediately went out and bought the largest fan that I could find and an extension cord (fortunately, most of our garden is hidden, so I don't end up burning too many retinas of the neighbors when I wear my swimsuit).

Later, I was visiting the Ozark Folk Center in Arkansas and Ms. Tina Marie Wilcox, the resident herbalist, related how she goes to the dollar store and buys linen tea towels.

After washing and drying, she prepares a pitcher of ice water and mixes in one to two drops of peppermint oil. She soaks a tea towel in the minted ice water, wrings it out, and then ties a bandana around her head, re-soaking as the towel dries out.

I tried it, and in combination with my fan and garden hose,



Submitted photo
Tina Marie Wilcox of the Ozark Folk Center in Arkansas recommends linen tea towels to stay cool during gardening.

Garden Tales

I can finally garden in summer ... except for the insects. Then serendipity stepped in again. We visited Indiana Botanical Gardens in Hobart and purchased an antimosquito formula with catnip and thyme. It seems to work really well to keep the mosquitoes and gnats away.

Catnip has been found to be more effective than DEET, the standard against all repellents are rated, but the side effect is that I am now a cat magnet.

While visiting relatives in Illinois, at a used book store (my weakness), I picked up a strange little volume, "Hortus Miscellaneus" by Frokner and Plato. This is full of odd lists of horticultural information, but the one I really like is how to keep your vases minty fresh. We all know that the slightest bit of dirt and bacteria will quickly sully the water. They suggest filling the vase with lukewarm water and adding one to two denture-cleaning tablets, depending on the volume of the container. Allow to stand overnight for sparkling clean vessels free of mineral deposits.

Returning from our summer

vacation, we found that our basement is infested (as in every autumn) with crickets. Do crickets come in herds, hoards, swarms, or just plain infestations? Either way, we have them!

The cats play with them and rip off the legs but never really make a dent in the population. Then Ms. Maggie Moor-Orth, Delaware Kent County extension agent, suggested the sticky mouse traps. They work!

However, placement is the key to success; for every four traps that I put out, two will be completely bare, while the other two will be so coated with crickets that you cannot see the sticky slab (within just 24 hours). Oh, and be sure to place them out of way of your cats and dogs or you'll wake up from a nightmare that there is a remake of the Night of the Living Dead in your house!

Editor's note: On the campus of Delaware State University, the Claude E. Phillips Herbarium is Delaware's center for research, education, and outreach about plant identifications, locations, and uses. Call 302-857-6452 (Dr. Susan Yost) to arrange a tour of the Herbarium, and call 302-857-6408 (Dr. Arthur Tucker) for more information about this article.

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A HOME & GARDEN Guide

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