

April 15, 2010



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4 Things Essential Fatty Acids

Essential fatty acids, or EFAs, are the building blocks of fat, much like amino acids are the building blocks of protein. EFAs regulate almost every bodily function making them necessary for your skunk, and other animals including humans. EFAs cannot be synthesized by the body so they must be obtained through food sources in the diet. There are two types of EFAs, omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids. Omega-9 is a fatty acid but not considered essential because the body can manufacture it as long as both omega-3 and omega-6 EFAs are present. If the animal is deficient in EFAs, then omega-9 will become essential and then must be obtained from diet. Supplementation of omega-9 fatty acids are not recommended as some studies suggest it may reduce the availability of the other essential fatty acids in the body. Good food sources for skunks of omega-9 fatty acids are olive oil and nuts. Omega-3 fatty acids are derived from Linolenic Acid, Omega-6 from Linoleic Acid, and Omega-9 from Oleic Acid. All EFAs are long-chain polyunsaturated fatty acids.

Omega-3

There are several different omega-3 fatty acids, the best known are eicosapentaenoic acid, or EPA, and docosahexaenoic acid, or DHA. EPA and DHA are the primary omega-3 fatty acids found in fish. Alpha-linolenic acid, or ALA, is also an omega-3 fatty acid derived from plant sources. ALA is considered a precursor to EPA and DHA in humans, but animals may not efficiently convert ALA to the DHA and EPA forms of Omega-3 fatty acids which have the strongest anti-inflammatory properties. Food sources of ALA like flax seeds, pumpkin seeds, walnuts and omega-3 enriched eggs are still nutrient dense foods and are highly recommended to include in your skunk's diet.

EPA and DHA from fish oil are the best known omega-3 fatty acids. Food sources include salmon, halibut, sardines, mackerel, trout, herring, and cod. Add fish to your skunk's diets at least twice per week to get the benefits of these foods. Skunks who will not eat fish, older skunks, and any skunk who has been diagnosed with an inflammatory condition will benefit from supplementation of omega-3 fish oils. Some studies have shown that DHA reduces stress aggression in animals. If you are feeding fish, please make sure it is not one of the many kinds contaminated with mercury. For the same reason, you must be cautious about fish oil supplements. A high quality children's

supplement from companies like Carlsons, Nordic Naturals or Garden of Life is the best choice. A skunk dose is the same as the dose for a child. Fish body oil is preferred over fish liver oil. Many fish liver oils like cod liver oil contain high levels of vitamins A and D that can build up in the liver and be harmful to your skunk. Some companies remove the excess Vitamins A and D to make them safe for daily supplementation.

Omega-6

Omega-6 fatty acids come from linoleic acid, or LA, and gamma-linolenic acid, or GLA. Linoleic acid is found in Sunflower oil, and Safflower oil, while GLA is found in Borage oil, Black Currant oil and Evening Primrose oil. GLA oils are especially useful with arthritis, diabetes and skin disorders. Too much omega-6 fatty acids can increase inflammatory eicosanoids. An enzyme called delta-6-desaturase, or D6D, is needed for omega-6 fatty acids to transform into GLA. Certain diseases suppress the activity of D6D such as diabetes, hypothyroidism, infection or cancer. Most skunks will not need supplementation of Omega-6 fatty acids as they are present in most of the protein sources commonly fed to skunks. Chicken, meat, eggs, and cheese are usually high in omega-6 fatty acids because farm animals are commonly fed a grain based diet. Nuts are naturally high in omega-6 fatty acids. If your skunk is getting 1 to 2 ounces of animal protein per day, their omega-6 fatty acid needs are covered. The exception would be skunks with one of the above named disorders may respond well to small doses of a GLA supplement.

Fatty acid balance is important to understand. Too much omega-6 can be inflammatory. Omega-6 to omega-3 imbalance has been linked to serious health conditions, such as heart disease, cancer, thyroid problems, accelerated aging, obesity, diabetes, and arthritis. On the average, pets fed a diet without omega-3 fatty acid supplementation have an approximate ratio of 20:1. This would mean 20 servings of omega-6 fatty acids to 1 serving of omega-3 fatty acids. Ideally, it should be between 10:1 and 5:1.

Essential Fatty Acids support the cardiovascular, immune, and nervous systems. Your skunk needs EFAs to manufacture and maintain cell membranes and for optimum nutrition. EFAs regulate important body functions, regulate inflammation and support the immune system. They are required for bone mineralization and for protein metabolism.

Maria Ellis
April 2010

Featured Product

Supplement Profile: Carlson for Kids Chewable DHA

A high quality EFA supplement providing 100mg of DHA and 50mg of EPA from fish body oil. Also contains 10 IU of Vitamin E to protect the fish oil from oxidation. Flavored and easy to dose. Give one chewable a day, 4 to 5 days a week. This product is tested and verified by an independent laboratory to be contaminant free, fresh and fully potent.



Featured Skunk

Thelma

Here's the story of how Thellie scared the bejesus out of me a while back. Hopefully it'll remind people to look everywhere!



One night several years ago, I had closed up the house & I called for Thelma to come along, it was bedtime. She didn't come. I called again, usually not necessary. Still no Thellie. I looked under Bill's desk in the den, her usual hideout. Not there. I looked in the boys' rooms, I checked my room - not there. By now, I'm starting to panic, so I've got the boys & Bill looking all over the house & the garage as well. No Thelma. I go into the back yard & call her name & keep calling, listening for any rustle in the bushes. Nothing. It's getting late & I'm in tears. I send the boys to bed. It's 11:30pm, I'm in my PJs in the front yard, on my hands & knees with a flashlight, crying & looking under the bushes calling her name. Nothing. I wandered around out there a little longer & finally went inside. I lay down in bed, sniffing quietly. By now Bill is asleep.

After a while, I hear a noise. Faint, but it's something in the room, something brushing against something. I jump up, turn on the light, scaring & blinding Bill & tell him ssshh!!

I listen carefully & the noise is coming from under my dresser. My dresser doesn't have legs, it rests right on the floor, so there's no way under it, or so I thought. I look by one edge & I can see part of a skunkie tail! I pull that big dresser away from the wall & reach under & out comes Thelma! Of course, I'm crying & hugging her & she's looking at me like I've lost my mind.

I'd pulled the dresser away earlier in the week because something had fallen behind it. When I pushed it back, it wasn't quite against the wall. She was able to wiggle herself through the tiny space & go under the bottom drawer, a space I was unaware of.

So if your skunk(s) go missing, look all through the house, even where you think they may not be able to access. You just never know.

Heidi Simmons
February, 2010

SO YOU WANT A PET SKUNK? – PART 2 ADOPTING OR BUYING – WHICH IS BETTER?

By Brenda and Don Hoch
April 1, 2010

In Part 1 of our article we discussed wanting a pet skunk, how to obtain a permit, and the options of adopting or buying. In Part 2 we're going to tell you about a couple of our skunks, purchased and adopted, and the behaviors we've experienced with both. We started with one skunk we purchased at a pet shop in 2006 and at present have twelve skunks – 2 purchased from a pet shop, 8 rescues, and 2 fosters awaiting homes.

To begin, we should probably tell you how we came to be skunk lovers. One day we were going into our local Petsmart and Don noticed a woman sitting on the bench out front with her baby skunk. He called my attention to her and we went over to see the skunk - it was probably the sorriest day of his life. He had wanted a pet skunk as a child so he was interested in seeing the skunk. We asked her about her skunk and she let me hold him. It was all downhill from there especially when she raved about skunks making a great pet. She got her skunk from the American Domestic Skunk Association (ADSA) in Clearwater, Florida. Without saying anything to Don, I started my research into skunk ownership with their website and when I was convinced getting a skunk was a good idea, I applied for our permit. Like most first time skunk owners, I decided a baby skunk would be better because it would be a cute, cuddly baby skunk that would bond with us quicker, mold to my pet skunk expectations, and not come with any bad habits – naïve wasn't I?

It was July and almost out of baby season so the ADSA didn't have any baby skunks available. I eventually found my way to the Florida Skunk Rescue site and emailed with several people for over a month about skunk ownership and buying vs. adopting a skunk. Just as I reconciled with the fact that I would have to wait until the following year's baby season, Maria Ellis emailed me at the end of August about a pet shop in Ft. Lauderdale that still had two skunks available. I called them and arranged to pick up a male skunk that weekend – Don was still in the dark as I had hoped to surprise him with a pet but having to go to Ft. Lauderdale, it was out of the question. When I got home from work, I casually asked Don what our plans were for that weekend. When he asked me what I wanted to do, I said we were driving to Ft. Lauderdale to pick up a skunk. While he was the one who said he'd always wanted a pet skunk, he thought I'd totally lost my mind and made dire predictions about wasting our money to purchase a skunk only to bring it home and have our greyhound eat it or that we'd drive all that way there and the skunk would already be sold.

Fortunately these predictions didn't come true but I also didn't get the pet I was expecting. Spike was about 4-1/2 months old and acted all lovable and cuddly at the pet shop. I held him the entire time I was completing the paperwork. Once we got him home and let him out of the pet taxi, he was like a little spitfire. Since he wasn't in his secure environment with his skunk friend like at the pet shop, he would stomp and growl at us constantly – typical skunk behavior but what did we know at that point? He did let me pick him up but the third day when I went to get him, he surprised me when he suddenly he bit my finger hard and his fang pierced my finger. I won't lie to you - it felt like someone had shot me with a nail gun. Spike had achieved his goal, he was now in charge and I was afraid – afraid of being bitten that hard again or harder. Having previously raised parrots, I was used to being bitten but not by something with a fang. I was determined to gain control again luckily for Spike or he would have ended up for adoption like so many skunks.

The first thing we did was take Spike for his vet visit and he calmed down some once he was neutered but still had a tendency to give you a nip from time to time but never a hard bite because he was no longer scared. The only way we can think to describe a skunk's nipping tendencies is to equate it a puppy trying out his teeth on you and getting carried away by biting too hard on your hand or finger because puppies have sharp teeth similar to skunks regular teeth.

I emailed with my new skunk friends about Spike's behavior and got a few helpful tips. We had to learn the difference between his nip on your arm meaning he wanted to be put down, his nip meaning he wanted to play (this was usually followed by a stomp), and the times when he was just being a brat and meant to nip us. Since skunks can't talk they have to communicate with you somehow - nipping, stomping, or scratching at your leg are some of their ways. Typically skunk owners can end up with a cut on their hand from a nip because they aren't expecting the nip and instinctively yank their hand away. It usually isn't the intent of the skunk to inflict the cut but it happens because they're teeth are sharp. Being new skunk owners, we didn't realize that Spike's behavior was typical of a lot of young skunks.

Up until he was approximately 2 years old, Spike wasn't my idea of the cuddly skunk I had envisioned I was buying us as he was more interested in running around than being held and cuddled. Once he turned 2-1/2 years old (he was a late bloomer), it seemed he had a total personality change. Now he wants us to pick him up and hold him a lot. He's become a big baby. At first we thought it was because this change was because he had to compete for attention with our other skunks but after having several other young skunks, we have decided they are just like kids and some of them go through the "terrible twos" (between 1-2 years old) more than others.

One interesting thing we discovered about Spike was he did not like dark colored dogs. As we mentioned in Part 1 of our article, we foster greyhounds. The first time we had an all black greyhound, he'd stomp and growl at it and try to nip their legs and feet. If the dog approached us while holding Spike, he would nip you on the arm hard enough to draw a little blood. I guess with his poor skunk eyesight, he thought he was biting the dog. After having several dark brindle or black greyhounds, we're happy to report that Spike has since learned to deal with them. It's a good thing too since we now have a black greyhound at our house that is a permanent foster.

What got me started me thinking about getting another skunk (although I truly didn't plan on 12), was an internet post for Judy Slade's Skunkie Easter Egg Hunt. It sounded like an interesting event and a chance to meet other skunk owners. Spike was now 10 months old and getting better about being handled. Attending the hunt we were worried about two things: how would Spike react and get along with other skunks, and how would we be able to tell him apart from the other skunks in attendance. We have to admit that we actually put a collar on him so we'd be able to tell him from the other skunks but took it off when we found we had no trouble telling which one was Spike. Because of Spike's nippiness with us, we were rather nervous letting Spike out with the others unsupervised but the experienced skunk owners were pretty laid back about this and quickly put us at ease. Much to our surprise, he was very well behaved, got along surprisingly well with the other skunks and didn't try to nip anybody that picked him up to hold him. We also made another discovery - we were the only people in attendance who owned only one skunk.

Enter Hershey. An email from Lynnda Butler said there was an abandoned skunk in Stuart, FL. I let her know that I was interested - poor Don was in the dark again. Hershey had been left on a neighbor, Kevin's doorstep but he couldn't keep him since he was raising snakes. Kevin had a skunk but it had died and when the neighbors moved, we suppose they thought Kevin would like a replacement. According to Kevin, the people had paid about \$800 for Hershey because of his unusual coloring. Hershey was all sweet and docile when Kevin handed him to me although I should have been suspicious of the fact he used a towel to catch him. He mentioned the owners had picked him up this way and wasn't sure if you could pick him up without it as he hadn't tried. Right! Let us just say that you can't be a skunk owner/adopter if you don't get nipped or bit a few times. It comes with the territory but if you persevere and go slow you can get just about any skunk not used to being handled to be sweet and lovable pretty quickly.

Hershey wasn't a nipper like Spike had been, he was older but he wasn't used to being handled without the towel and being petted unless he was sitting on your lap. At a loss of how to get Hershey used to our touching him, I decided to start by scratching him near the base of his tail while he was eating. Through trial and error, we have found that when faced with a choice between biting you and eating, a skunk will choose eating every time. Of course, I was always careful not to get too close to the back of his neck where he'd be able to grab me at first. We quarantined Hershey for a couple of days and then we let him interact with Spike. There was some growling and stomping, but they worked out their turf without bloodshed. Hershey loved the freedom of being able to run where he wanted, but we did have a problem when he decided to take up residence under our bed, he wanted to hide under it 24-7 and not socialize with us at all. At first we had to push him out with a broom and then shut the bedroom door so he couldn't go back and hide until bedtime. We were later able to lure him out with snacks. I would start leaving a trail of little pieces of nuts right up to where I was sitting on the floor and then I would pick him up with the towel and hold him. The first time I picked Hershey up without the towel, I don't know who was more surprised, Hershey or me. I was getting something out of my walk-in closet and Hershey tried to run in. It was just instinct to pick him up so he didn't go in there. Hershey eventually decided that he liked being petted and scratched and would let you pick him up without a towel. Sadly we only had Hershey for 2 years before he passed away due to a bad heart murmur undetected by our original vet.

Our second rescue (3rd skunk) was a lot easier. As the story goes, Bella was found wandering in a field near a mobile home park. A resident found her, and she and several of the other residents shared custody with Bella visiting from house to house. Bella came to the rescue when the woman's boyfriend tried to sell her without the proper permit. Since Bella's history was sketchy, nobody wanted her as they thought she might have a lot of medical problems and need extensive blood work, etc. This time we made a trip to Pompano Beach, FL and Don was on board for this rescue having fallen under the skunk spell. Bella had obviously been handled a lot as she would let you pick her up and hold her but didn't like having her feet and head touched and still doesn't after 2 years. We had her examined by our vet who took the wait and see approach before doing blood work - Bella was deemed in good health. For an albino skunk, Bella's fur had a yellow tint to it and was very thin and coarse. Her tail was almost bare. For a skunk that supposedly wandered around outside, she apparently knew all the right places to dine as she was a 13 pound skunk in about a 6 pound frame. We got Bella in August 2007 and with a change to a diet provided by Mary Vice and a daily dose of Pet Span, Bella's fur grew back in so nice that we were able to enter her in the skunk show the following month. She came in 1st place for Albino Skunks. Bella's fur continues to improve and her tail gets fuller all the time. Cutting her nails requires a trip to the vets because she won't let us cut them. Bella is Daddy's little girl, very spoiled, and can do no wrong so heaven forbid that I upset her by trying to get her used to us touching her feet. Do you think if I made Daddy hold her while I cut her nails and she bit him a time or too, he'd change his mind about upsetting her? You betcha. With the proper diet, Bella has slimmed down to 7 lbs now but it's hard getting that last pound off of her as she doesn't want to run around very much and prefers to spend most of her evening being held by her Daddy.

Now that we'd gotten our feet wet with our first two rescues, Maria Ellis asked us to take on a big challenge - Leonardo. Leonardo was a 1 year old skunk that weighed 20 lbs and was kept in a cage. He was now in his second home having been rescued by a woman who saw a "skunk for adoption" notice in her vet's office. Leonardo was one unhappy camper. He hadn't received the proper attention as a youngster, was grossly overweight from a dog food diet, and going through a really bad case of the terrible two's. She thought he would be like her other skunk that she could pick up and cuddle but moved too fast with Leonardo and he bit her a couple of times. Like me with Spike, she was now afraid of him. In addition, Leonardo had a strong food drive and if you were in the kitchen, he associated your feet as his food source - he would literally jump on your bare toes (didn't bite them fortunately) or would hug your ankle and nip at it to let you know he wanted to be fed. She thought he was attacking her and when he stomped at her dog that he was attempting to attack her dog. We weren't really crazy about his name and started trying to think of a good name for him. Our trip to pick up Leonardo in Pompano Beach had coincided with a visit to see Don's brother who lived in Pompano Beach. Don's two nephews, Bill and Bob, were visiting their father and as a joke I told them I was naming the skunk after them, i.e. Billy Bob. The name stuck.

Being at least 10 lbs over weight, Billy couldn't move too well. It's just fortunate that he was a big boned skunk otherwise he would have only been able to roll around and not walk. We put Billy on our standard diet and within a year he was down to 10 lbs and a much happier skunk. He did get down to less than 10 lbs. but he started looking too thin so we have to increase his portions. You don't want a skunk to lose weight too fast or they'll have a lot of loose skin.

Billy wasn't used to being petted or picked up and held and would bite the minute you tried. I used the same routine I used with Hershey. As I do with all my rescues, I kept Billy separate from the others and tried to introduce him gradually. It turns out we had to permanently keep Billy away from the others, especially the smaller skunks because he would try to attack them. It didn't help that the other skunks would tease Billy while he was in his cage by sitting near his cage just out of his reach. It drove Billy nuts.

We had Billy over a year when I started to think he might be happier in a home where he was the only skunk. The only problem was I couldn't convince anyone to give him a chance especially when I had to tell them he was nippy, couldn't be picked up, didn't play nice with others, and that he might have to be their only skunk. As we were completing this article, we had the opportunity to provide a skunk to the Calusa Nature Center in Ft Myers, Florida. They had lost their skunk they used in their nature programs and wanted another friendly skunk. Unfortunately we didn't have any skunks available, friendly or otherwise, and after much soul searching we suggested they take Billy for their skunk enclosure while we looked for a friendly skunk for them. I truly felt that if he could be the only skunk and someone had the time to work with him more that he would eventually become a lovable skunk that you could pick up. We didn't feel we were being fair by keeping him penned up with only a short period each day to run around a bigger area and the other skunks annoying him. Calusa agreed to take a look at Billy and we made the trip on Thursday, March 25th, to check out them out and see if they would be happy with Billy and vice versa. Ruth Wilburn, Calusa Animal Director, put Billy in his new enclosure while she gave us a tour of the center. We were very impressed with what we saw. All their animals have wonderful enclosures in a beautiful wooded setting and are very well taken care of and loved. They can even pet their bobcat.

After the tour, Ruth took Billy home with her and planned on doing so for the first two nights until he got used to her and hopefully would allow her to handle him for her nature talks. The first night at Ruth's house, Billy allowed Ruth to pick him up without biting and lay up on her bed while they watched TV. When she emailed us the next day to tell me what a great time she and her husband had with Billy, we swore she couldn't be talking about the same skunk we had given them. Saturday evening the center was having a sleep over in the museum for a group of kids and it was to be Billy's first time spending all night in his enclosure. Ruth would be there overnight and could monitor how well Billy was adjusting. She emailed me on Sunday to let me know what a wonderful time Billy had and that he spent the entire night running around the museum with the kids (he never did get put in his enclosure), letting the kids pet him, and being fed snacks. She and her husband have become really bonded with him in a short time. In a recent update from Ruth, it looks like Billy will have the best of both worlds - a huge outdoor enclosure to run around in during the day while Ruth is at the center and the comfort of a home with human companionship at night. Her dogs already know that Billy is boss, and he and their cat have become friends. We're anxiously awaiting pictures from the sleep over to make a photo id of our Billy. We're positive he was abducted by aliens and a friendly skunk left in his place but Ruth vows that it was Billy. If you ever visit the Calusa Nature Center in Ft. Myers, Florida, please say "hello" to Billy. Their website is www.calusanature.com. How's that for grateful that we rescued him?

In September 2008 we got a call from Judy Slade. She had rescued 3 skunks from a pet shop that wasn't caring for them properly. There was one female and two males and I promptly told her I wanted the female. I made arrangements to pick her up from another volunteer's house but when I saw the skunk I almost left her there. She was a brown and white swirl skunk and on the top of her head she had these 2 little white spots that reminded me of devil horns. I just knew that this skunk was going to be trouble. She promptly proved it by peeing on me when I picked her up.

This is our skunk named Nutmeg that a lot of you know from the skunk show. She was commonly being referred to as the shoulder skunk or was seen hiding in my shirt alternating between making me look like Dolly Parton or the Hunchback of Notre Dame depending on where she was sleeping. As for being a devil, she didn't disappoint us. She was like the energizer bunny on speed and just zoomed around the house all the time. You could get jumpy just watching her as she didn't sit still. She also wouldn't let you hold her for more than a minute and was constantly nipping because she wanted to be put down to run rather than being held. She weighed approximately 3 lbs when we got her and thought nothing of climbing up bookshelves, into drawers or anywhere else that took her fancy. We couldn't wait for the day when she got bigger with a heavier bottom so it would be harder for her to climb. She never got any bigger than 4 lbs. but she did lose her desire to climb. She tried to boss around all the skunks that were there prior to her as if to say "the Queen has arrived" and would stomp or nip at them especially in the kitchen where she quickly learned there was food. If you saw her and are reading this, you probably think we can't possibly be talking about the calm, sweet skunk you saw at the show but by the time you saw her, she was 1-1/2 years old, almost out of the terrible twos and on her best behavior for the show.

Why are we telling you all this, especially when it must seem that skunks do nothing but bite or nip? We are trying to show you that it doesn't matter if you buy a skunk or adopt a skunk, you can still end up with one that is nippy and requires some TLC to make them sweet and lovable or one that is good from day one. Some new and current skunk owners are hesitant to adopt a skunk as they fear it won't be friendly. We've adopted many skunks that were friendly right away - they include Bella, DaVinci, Betsy, Flower, Simon, Sammy and Setsuna. A skunk's disposition depends on a lot of things: (1) their individuality - they're just like people and come in all sizes, colors, have different personalities and quirks; (2) their age, i.e. is it going through the terrible twos; (3) how much attention did the skunk get at a young age; (4) is the skunk spayed or neutered; or (5) was it abused. It is still our opinion that you need to do your research and that some people are not equipped to deal with the idiosyncrasies of owning a skunk. Also, you should give careful consideration to owning a skunk if you have small children especially under the age of 8 because you'll need to be diligent in your supervision of the interaction between your skunk and your children. You'll want both to be safe, so you'll have to teach the kids good skunk ownership. Through the rescue we get a lot of skunks for adoption because people did not do their research to make sure they knew what to expect when bringing home that sweet little baby skunk. I can't tell you how many we've seen that get put up for adoption from first time skunk owners because they didn't take the time to let the skunk adjust to its new environment before picking it up, got bit, and became afraid of handling the skunk.

Now that you have more information, do you get a skunk for a pet or not? Is there really any difference between a skunk you buy from the pet shop and one that you can rescue? We don't think so but the choice is yours.

You can contact us if you need to re-home your skunk.
We can help you at no charge if you want to adopt a skunk.

We need stories!

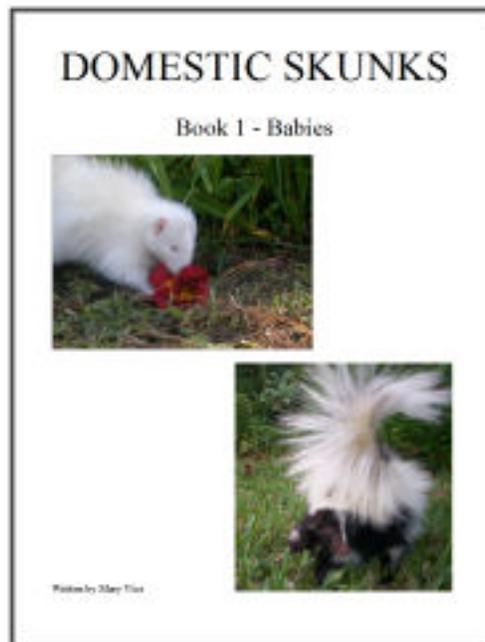
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Question for Ashlar



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