

Pets Q&A: Dog owner worried about mushrooms in her lawn

BY JOAN MORRIS
The Mercury News

DEAR JOAN — I just picked a mushroom out of my lawn. I have two beagles that eat everything. Is this a dangerous one? They are coming out everywhere!

Anything nontoxic to get rid of them if they are bad ones?

— Sharon Stevens, Newark, California

DEAR SHARON: When it comes to animals and mushrooms, veterinarians tell us to treat all mushrooms as poisonous. That way, you don't have to wonder about it, and you can protect your dog from a potentially fatal mistake. Even mushrooms that are considered safe for humans can cause stomach upset in some dogs, so the best thing is to remove the fungi.

That's easier said than done.

The presence of mushrooms in your lawn can be an indication that your soil is healthy. Mushrooms help to break down organic matter, making nutrients available to other plants. They also can be a sign that your lawn is getting too much water — we often



Dreamstime-TNS

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see mushrooms popping up after heavy rains — or that your lawn may be suffering with a thick layer of thatch. If you have a tree planted nearby, the mushrooms could be sprouting from a dying tree root.

We also tend to have a lot of organic material in our lawns and flower beds

— looking at you, wood chips — so you should give your lawn a good raking and cleanup, which will help eliminate the mushrooms.

There are ways of getting rid of them above and below ground, but some of those methods would put your dogs at risk, and

others can harm your lawn. The use of fungicides is not recommended for people with pets and children. Horticultural vinegar, which is much stronger than household vinegar, is safer, but can kill the grass.

Spraying a mixture of 2 tablespoons baking soda to a gallon of water will

slowly kill the mushrooms. You also can poke holes in the soil around the mushrooms and pour in a mixture of 2 tablespoons dish soap with up to 3 gallons water.

The fastest and perhaps easiest way is to simply pluck them from the ground, although that won't

stop them from fruiting again. You'll have to keep an eye out for new ones popping up.

DEAR JOAN: I am hoping you can shed some light on our situation. We have noticed rocks moving in our yard over the years, but they seem to be more frequent ... at least every five days or so.

We have searched and found no tracks or any other evidence. Our backyard is completely fenced in, as of four months ago, and it is only one to three rocks in one spot in the yard. And yes, it is the same rock, which is even more mysterious.

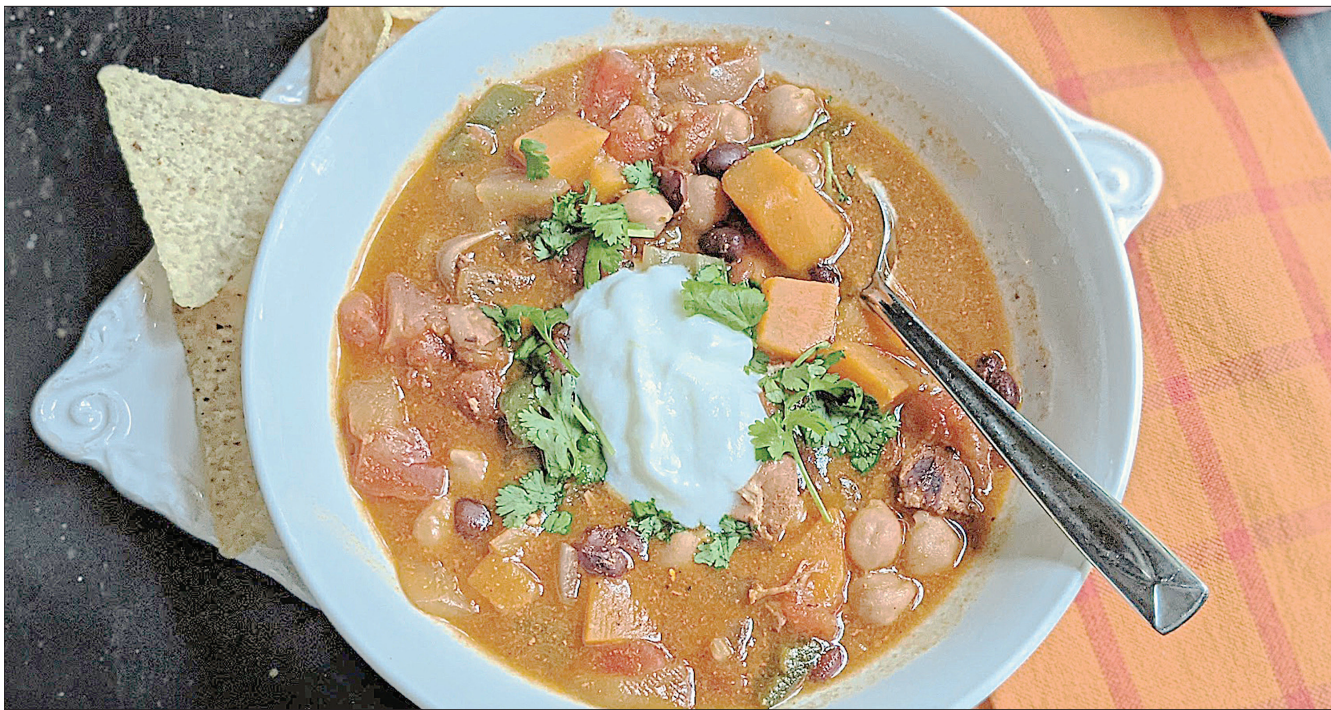
Aside from these rocks moving, we see no other evidence of any animal.

— Cindy Heredia, Albuquerque, New Mexico

DEAR CINDY:

My best guess is that you have a raccoon visiting your yard, one that either has a highly developed sense of feng shui or is looking for some smaller critter, such as a lizard or insect, that is hiding among the rocks.

It might be worth investing in a wildlife camera and focusing it on the bed. Or hiring an exorcist.



Gretchen McKay/Pittsburgh Post-Gazette-TNS

A spicy coconut sweet potato stew is just the thing to take the chill off of a cool autumn evening.

Slow-cooker sweet potato chili to warm you up

By GRETCHEN MCKAY
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Did you (reluctantly) turn on your furnace this past week? I did, too, which indicates it's probably time to snuggle up for winter.

It also means it's time to brush up on your chili recipe repertoire so your insides will feel as warm and toasty.

Chili is a favorite fall dish, and often includes either chicken or beef. This recipe gets its protein from canned beans, with sweet potato adding the vitamin C and vitamin B6 that could help scare away winter colds.

I used chipotle chili powder, which added a pretty fiery kick to the dish; the addition of yogurt just before serving helped cool it down. The chili was even better the next day (I ate it for breakfast) and it also freezes well for those busy, don't-feel-like-cooking nights when the microwave is your best friend.

You can dish this chili right out of the slow cooker and into a bowl. Or, serve over a bed of rice or quinoa. Garnish with

fresh herbs and an optional dollop of yogurt and/or shredded coconut. It's also delicious with tortilla chips crumbled on top.

SLOW-COOKER COCONUT SWEET POTATO CHILI

- 1/2 medium sweet onion, diced
- 2 stalks of celery, diced
- 2 Granny Smith or other tart apples, peeled, cored and diced
- 2 large sweet potatoes or yams, peeled and cubed
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 poblano chilies, cored and chopped
- 15-ounce can black beans, rinsed and drained
- 15-ounce can garbanzo beans, rinsed and drained
- 15-ounce can fire-roasted tomatoes
- 15-ounce can coconut milk
- 2 cups of chicken or vegetable broth
- 1 tablespoon of your favorite chili powder, or more (or less) to taste
- 2 teaspoons ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon of dried oregano
- 2-3 teaspoons curry

- powder, optional
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Red pepper flakes, to taste
- 1/2 cup plain yogurt, plus more for serving
- Chopped fresh cilantro, parsley or chives, for garnish
- Shredded unsweetened coconut, for garnish, optional

Place onion, celery, apples, sweet potatoes, garlic and chopped poblano in the crock of a 6-quart slow cooker. Stir to combine, then add beans, tomatoes, coconut milk and chicken or vegetable broth.

Stir again, then add chili powder, cumin, oregano and optional curry powder. Season generously with salt and pepper.

Cook on high heat for 4 hours, or on low for 6-8 hours. A few hours in, taste and add more chili powder, as desired, or a pinch or two of cayenne pepper if you like chili on the spicy side.

Toward the end of cooking, open the lid to allow the chili to thicken. If the chili looks a bit dry, add a bit more broth or water.

Just before serving, stir in yogurt. Spoon into warmed bowls and garnish with fresh chopped herbs and a dollop of yogurt, if desired.

Serves 8.
— Gretchen McKay

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