

How to Prevent Conflicts with Bears

Bears have acute eyesight and hearing. Their sense of smell is seven times greater than a bloodhound's. They have a keen ability to detect pet food, garbage, barbecue grills and bird feeders—and once they locate a food source, they remember where it is.

Bears are normally wary of people, but if a bear finds food without getting frightened away, he may come back for more. Each time this happens, he can become less fearful—and this habituation can lead to problems. Conflicts can heighten during hyperphagia, a feeding frenzy in late summer and fall in which bears bulk up for hibernation, gaining 3-4 pounds and consuming 20,000 calories a day.

To avoid habituating the bears in your area, follow these steps.

- Make trash cans inaccessible. Bring them inside at night or buy a bear-resistant trash can or an enclosure for the container.
- Enclose your compost pile. Open compost piles, especially those that include kitchen scraps, are an irresistible treat in bear country. Burying compost won't work because bears will easily find and dig it up.
- Recycle wisely. If you store recyclables outside, use enclosed bins. (Persistent bears will break into even ruggedly built bins.)
- Keep your barbecue grill clean and as free of drippings as possible. Move the grill away from your house when you aren't using it, and clean it regularly with ammonia or bleach.
- Rethink your bird feeders. In the summer, birds can make do with naturally available foods. If you do set up feeders, install them away from your house.

Biologist Stephen Herrero: "There's no question that it's possible for people and bears to coexist without serious problems if we're willing to manage our food and garbage."

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