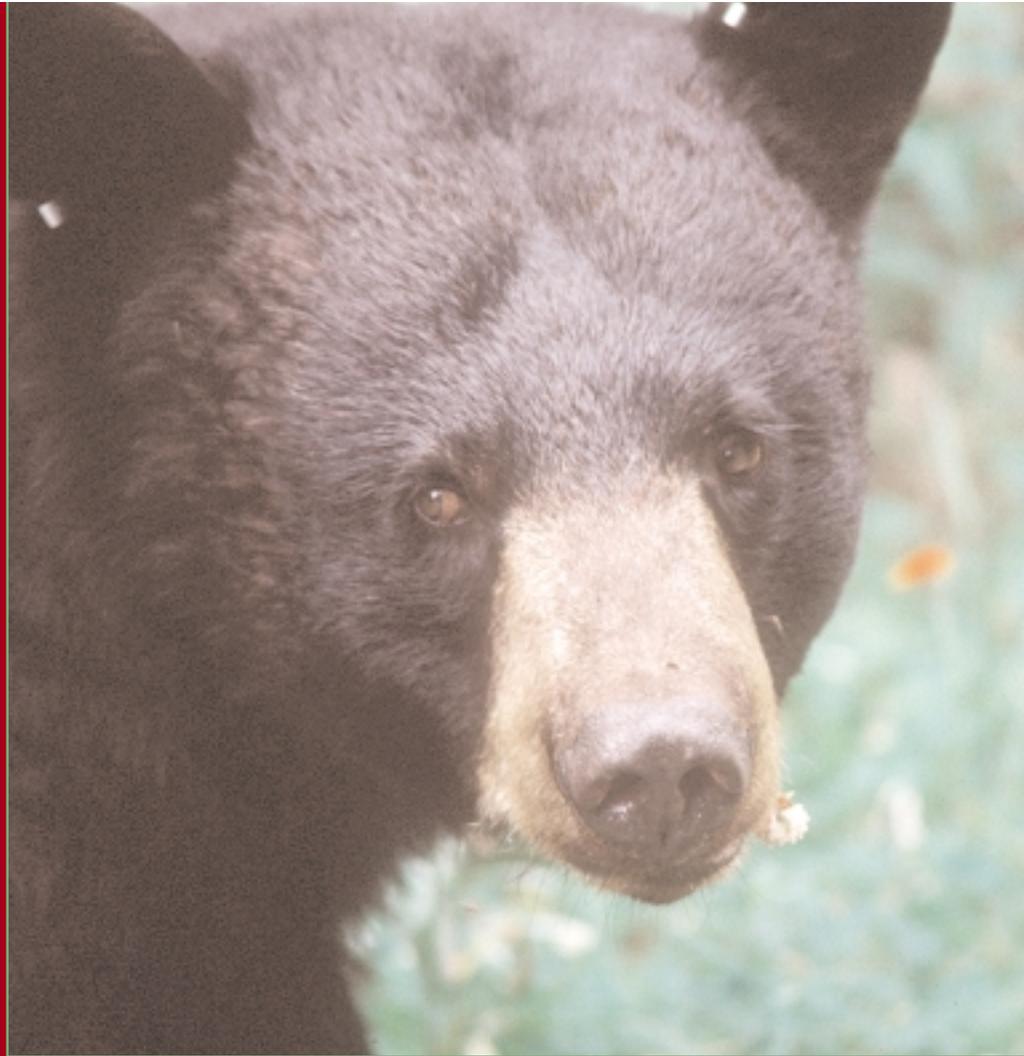




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Living with Black Bears in Ontario

*A guide to co-existing
with black bears*



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Facts about Black Bears

- There are about 75,000 to 100,000 black bears in Ontario.
- Black bears are active from mid-April to late fall in most parts of the province.
- Most black bears enter their dens by mid-October in the north and by early November in central Ontario. However, bears will stay out of their dens longer when fall foods are abundant.
- Black bear cubs are generally born in January while their mothers are in their dens. Cubs stay with their mothers for approximately 16-18 months following their birth.
- Between early July and late September bears typically double their body weight as they prepare for winter hibernation. Black bears do not eat or drink while in their winter dens.
- Black bears are omnivorous (they feed on both plants and animals).
- Black bears feed mainly on summer and fall berry crops such as raspberries, blueberries and mountain ash, as well as acorns and beech nuts in the fall.
- Natural foods vary greatly in abundance from year to year. Bears may look for other food sources more actively in the spring if the previous year's food supply was poor and they are in poor condition. They may also look for alternate food sources in late summer and fall if the current year's food supply is poor. Consequently, food or garbage around homes, cottages and campsites will become attractive to bears.



- Black bears are generally timid and avoid encounters with people, but they can come into conflict with people especially when natural foods are scarce.
- Black bears are large, powerful animals. Adult males can weigh 120 - 280 kg (250 - 600 lbs.). Adult females can weigh 45 - 180 kg (100 - 400 lbs.). Black bears are not normally aggressive towards humans, however, on extremely rare occasions, bears can be dangerous.

bears are not normally aggressive



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How bears can become nuisances

- Bears will travel more than 100 km to a known food source, such as a berry patch or a stand of beech trees. Bears are highly intelligent and will learn where other food sources can be found and seek them out. They can easily learn to re-visit your backyard or campsite once they have determined that food can be found there.
- The majority of bear problems occur as a result of improperly stored household garbage. Bears quickly learn to associate human residences and campsites with a readily available food source.
- Bears are also attracted to pet food that is left outdoors, bird feeders, barbecues, composters, fruit trees, beehives, sweetcorn and grain fields.
- Garbage dumps provide a concentration of readily available food that often attracts bears.
- Bears lose their natural fear of humans through repeated exposure to people in areas where food is intentionally or unintentionally provided. In such cases, conflict with humans is inevitable; bears may even become destructive or dangerous.
- Such bears are often destroyed because they have become a “nuisance” or are perceived as a threat to human safety. That is why you should never intentionally feed bears or place food to attract wildlife to your yard for viewing.

**You can help prevent problems and protect bears.
Don't intentionally feed bears and always use
bear-proof garbage containers.**



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How to prevent nuisance bear problems

Residences

- Store garbage in steel bear-proof containers if possible – do not store garbage in old fridges or freezers as bears learn to knock them over to access their contents.
- Alternatively, store garbage in airtight containers inside a storage area that is not accessible to bears.
- Garbage for pick-up should be put out on the morning of collection and not the night before.
- Keep meat scraps in your freezer until garbage pick-up day.
- Wash garbage containers and dumpsters frequently.
- Use lime to cut odours.
- Do not feed other wildlife as you may attract bears.
- If you feed birds, fill feeders only in late fall and empty them after mid-April when bears come out of their dens.
- Do not leave pet food outdoors at night.
- Clean up outdoor grills after use.
- Pick all ripe fruit off trees, and remove vegetables and fallen fruit from the ground.
- Do not put meat, fish or sweet food in your composter.
- Rinse containers before disposal and recycling.
- Use electric fencing to protect valuable trees, orchards, beehives and vegetable and berry patches.



Campsites

- Keep your campsite clean, and don't burn food scraps or fat drippings in the fire.
- Do not cook, eat or store food in your tent.
- Keep food in the trunk of a vehicle, or hang your food pack at least 4 m off the ground between two trees well away from the campsite.
- Be alert for bears and signs of bear activity as they may have been attracted by previous campers.

Remember that even though an attractant to bears has been removed, it may take several days for a bear to stop visiting a particular area.

What to do if you encounter a bear

Bears are normally shy of humans and quickly get out of our way when they see us. There are a number of things you can do if you spot a bear on a trail or one enters your campsite or yard.

- Do not approach the bear to get a better look. Slowly back away while watching the bear and wait for it to leave.
- If you are near a building or car, get inside it as a precaution. If the bear was attracted to food or garbage, make sure it is removed after the bear leaves to discourage the bear from returning.
- It is important to keep dogs away from a bear. While a well-trained dog may deter a bear, a poorly trained one may only excite it resulting in the bear following the dog back to its owner.
- If a bear is in a tree, leave it alone. Remove people and dogs from the area. The bear will usually come down and leave when it feels safe.

If a bear is trying to get at food in your yard or campsite (and a building or a car is not within reach) or if a bear tries to approach you, here is how you should react:

- Stop. Face the bear. Do not run. If you are with others, stay together and act as a group. Make sure that the bear has a clear escape route, then yell and wave your arms to make yourself look bigger. Use a whistle or airhorn if you have one. The idea is to be aggressive and to persuade the bear to leave. This will work if the bear is still partly afraid of humans.
- If these attempts fail to frighten the bear away, slowly back away watching the bear and giving it a wide berth.
- Climbing a tree to get away from a bear may offer you little advantage as black bears are excellent tree climbers.
- A bear may stand upright to get a better view, make huffing or “popping” sounds, swat or beat the ground with its forepaws or even bluff charge. These are a bear’s way of telling you that you are too close. Back off and give the bear more space. If the bear comes within range, use pepper spray if you have it.

slowly back away



How to recognize a potentially dangerous encounter

Injuries by black bears are rare, but can occur in the following situations:

- **Cornered bears**

Black bears may become anxious or annoyed if they are crowded by people or dogs, or if intently focused on a food source. These bears will generally give many warning signs (they may make huffing or “popping” sounds, swat or beat the ground with their forepaws or even bluff charge) to let you know that you are too close.

- **Mother bears protecting their young**

Mother bears are rarely aggressive towards humans but they are protective of their cubs. Do not test this by intentionally approaching cubs or knowingly getting between them and their mother. The mother bear will generally give you many warning signs to let you know that you are too close.

- **Predatory black bears**

On EXTREMELY RARE occasions, black bears (usually adult males) have attacked humans with the intent to kill and eat them. This has happened about 40 times in the last century in North America (six incidents in Ontario). By comparison, many more people have been killed by lightning, dogs, and bee stings.

Predatory black bears may not make huffing or “popping” sounds, swat or beat the ground with their forepaws or perform bluff charges. Instead, they may press closer and closer to their intended prey assessing whether it is safe to attack.

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Here is what to do if you find yourself in one of these situations.

- Slowly back away, watching the bear.
- If the bear tries to approach you, stop. Be aggressive, yell, throw rocks or sticks and use pepper spray if you have it. **NEVER TURN AND RUN.**
- If the bear continues to approach you, resume backing away slowly while continuing to be aggressive towards the bear.
- If a bear makes contact with you, **DO NOT PLAY DEAD.** Fighting back is the best chance of persuading a black bear to stop its attack. Use a large stick, a rock or anything else that you have on hand to hurt the bear.

**For more information contact your local
Ministry of Natural Resources Office.**