



Black bear

Precautions can ease human-bear conflicts

Living in Wyoming for many residents means living in “bear country.”

Depending upon which part of the state a resident lives, he or she may have to contend with black bears, grizzly bears, or both. Conflicts occur between humans and both species of bear, but simple steps can be taken to avoid problems around homes in rural areas and in the outskirts of towns where people and bears coexist.

Every year, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) responds to and manages human/bear conflicts, many of which could have been prevented. WGFD defines conflicts as incidents of property damage (with or without the bear receiving a food reward), damages to beehives, livestock depredations, incidents of bears receiving food rewards, and incidents resulting in human injuries or deaths or human-caused bear mortalities.

The best way to prevent property damages and threats to safety at home is to not attract bears.

Keep food away from bears, and store garbage

in a bear-resistant container or in a sturdy building until the day of pick up. For information about bear-resistant products, see the Living with Wildlife Foundation (LWWF) Web site (www.lwwf.org) or contact the author (see information below). Bears are crepuscular, which means they are more active at dawn and dusk than during any other time of the day. Even an empty container or a bear-resistant container will still lure a bear – they have an amazing sense of smell!

Birdfeed offers an enticing, high-calorie, easily accessed snack. Residents living in bear country should not feed birds when bears are active, generally April through October. Those insisting on feeding birds are encouraged to hang feeders at least 10 feet high and 4 feet away from the nearest climbing structure. This can be accomplished with a pulley system or extension pole with a hook on the end. A catch pan will keep the ground clear of fallen seed.

Pet food is also a highly sought-after treat. Remember to feed pets indoors, and store food

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inside. If a pet lives outside year-round, remember to cleanup excess food daily.

Grains used to feed livestock are also attractive. Feed only as much grain as needed in a single feeding. Store grain in bear-resistant containers or inside a sturdy, sealed building or other structure. Costs for bear-resistant storage products vary and may not be the best option for storing large amounts of grain. Having a very sturdy, reinforced building in which grain will be stored is best. For information about bear-resistant storage containers, visit the LWWF Web site.

If a stock animal dies, move it well away from live animals or, better yet, dispose at a local landfill or other facility that accepts carcasses. Burying carcasses does not deter bears for long, as they can still smell and dig up the carcasses.

Avoid planting fruit- or nut-producing trees or shrubs. Bears are highly attracted to these plants when the fruit ripens, usually in late summer or fall. Homeowners having such plants should consider replacing them with shrubs and trees that do not attract bears. As a general rule, if a tree or shrub produces any sort of fruit, berry, or nut – don't plant it. The book *Living with Bears* is a good resource to answer all questions about feeding pets, bird feeding, landscaping, and storing garbage in bear country. The book is available through the WGFD Alternative Enterprises Program at <https://gf.state.wy.us/ae/pc-172-30-living-with-bears.aspx>.

Homeowners not wishing to remove bear-attracting trees and shrubs might want to pick the ripe fruit and nuts and keep the ground clear of fallen fruit. Another option is to install a temporary electric fence around them. Electric fence is a very effective and inexpensive way of preventing bears from receiving food rewards and loitering in an area. Please note that electric fencing will not prevent a bear from smelling and approaching the area. Electric fence also works to keep bears out of beehives, garbage containers, and vegetable gardens and away from livestock.

Barbecue grills, petroleum products, fertilizers, and compost piles also attract bears. Keep grills clean, and try to store them, along with petroleum products and fertilizers, inside a building. Composting leaves, grass, and sawdust is OK, but avoid putting table scraps in a pile as they might attract bears. Composting manure may also attract bears as they have been known to ingest horse manure.

If a bear is attracted to a residence, preventing the animal from receiving a food reward by gaining access to garbage, pet food, birdfeed, or other non-natural foods is important. Bears that receive food rewards have been proven to become food-conditioned. Food-conditioned means a bear becomes dependent upon unnatural food sources, such as garbage, for a large part of its diet. Food-conditioned bears develop destructive and potentially dangerous behaviors – dangerous for humans and dangerous for the bears. These are the bears that



Bear diet diverse

prove the old adage “A Fed Bear is a Dead Bear” true, and often property is damaged before the bear ends up dead.

When a bear becomes too severely food-conditioned, it is the job of WGFD to remove or euthanize the bear. It is done for the safety of people who may encounter the bear and to stop the sometimes expensive property damage by a bear seeking a food reward. Usually, this move can be prevented if the bear is kept away from human food and garbage.

Not only are these tips great for humans and great for bears, they also help to prevent problems with other wildlife. Storing unnatural foods away from bears also limits access to foods attractive to raccoons, deer, and other animals. By making a few small changes, homeowners can help make their properties and neighborhoods a safer place to live, prevent property damages, and reduce the number of bears being euthanized due to becoming food-conditioned.

For questions about trees and shrubs to avoid planting in bear country, electric fence, or any other items of interest related to this article, please contact the author.

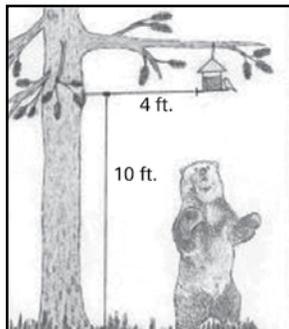
Each spring the WGFD holds Living in Bear, Lion, and Wolf Country workshops. To find out the date and time of a workshop near you, contact a local WGFD office. WGFD office contact information is available in your local area phonebook or on the Web at <http://gf.state.wy.us/admin/regional/index.asp>.



Grizzly bear



Grizzly bear cub



Correct positioning of birdfeeder

Bears are attracted to petroleum products, especially fuel and propane, because of the smell. Any product that smells can attract a bear – deodorant, cosmetics, empty food cans and wrappers, rubber, and vinyl products.

Bears have omnivorous diets – they will eat a wide variety of plant and animal matter. In the Greater Yellowstone Area, grizzly bear diets consist primarily of meat. An abundant food source in the northwest corner of Wyoming is wild ungulates (elk, moose, and deer) and occasionally domestic animals.

Bears will eat anything, though! Berries, grasses, forbs, insects, and nuts are usually a part of any bear’s diet. In areas with people, bears will eat dog food, garbage, grain, birdfeed, and sometimes hot tub covers or all-terrain vehicle seats! They eat the foam rubber or tear up the items.

If a bear is near, stay in your home or get to a secure location. The most secure location is inside a home or vehicle. Make noise by banging pots and pans together or use some other sort of noisemaker, and yell at the bear from a secure location. For information about encounters with bears when camping or hiking in bear country, the *Staying Safe in Bear Country* DVD is an excellent resource. It is available in public libraries in northwestern Wyoming. If you do not live in northwest Wyoming, see the information at the end of this article for information on where the DVD may be purchased.

If a bear is eating food at or near your home or a neighbor’s home, or it will not leave your property, call a local Wyoming Game and Fish Department office and report the incident. Never approach or feed a bear.

Other good sources of information:

- *Living with Bears* by Linda Masterson
- *Living in Bear Country* and *Staying Safe in Bear Country* DVDs available at www.distributionaccess.com. Select **Home** and **USA**, then click on the **Select** button. In the **Quick Search** box, type in the name of the DVD (either *Living in Bear Country* or *Staying Safe in Bear Country*) and then click on the **go** button.