

# A Homeowner's Guide Living in Bear Country



## BE BEAR AWARE


A PUBLICATION OF  
THE FLORIDA FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Florida Fish and Wildlife  
Conservation Commission  
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# BE BEAR AWARE



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# If a bear comes into your yard...

If you encounter a bear at close range, remain standing upright, avoid direct eye contact, back up slowly and speak in a calm, assertive, assuring voice.

- *Do not feed the bear.*
- *Never approach the bear.*
- *Make sure the bear has an escape route.*
- *Yell, bang pots and pans, or use an air horn to scare the bear away.*
- *If the bear will not leave, move to your house, car or building.*
- *Do not run from the bear.*

If the bear climbs a tree, keep people and pets away. Eventually, when things quiet down, the bear will come down and leave. This usually happens after dark when the bear feels safe.



# Did you know?

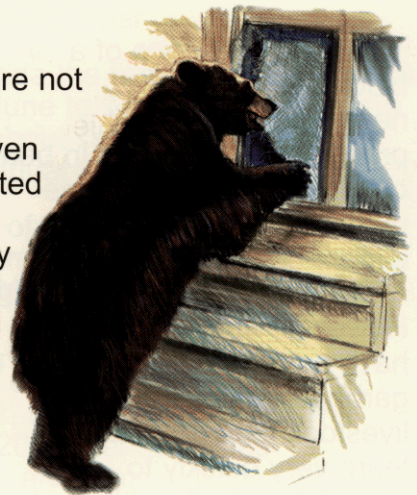
When a bear stands on its hind legs it is merely trying to get a better view, rather than acting in a threatening way.

A bear may huff, snap its jaws and swat the ground. This behavior means the bear is uncomfortable and you are too close. Slowly back away. Do not run.

Black bears will sometimes “bluff charge” when they are cornered, feel threatened, or when they are attempting to steal food. Stand your ground and then slowly back away.

Contrary to popular belief, female black bears typically do not aggressively defend their cubs against humans.

Black bears are not generally aggressive even when confronted by humans. However, they are large, powerful, wild animals that need to be respected.



**If you are experiencing nuisance bear problems, please contact the nearest Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission regional office. The phone number can be found in the State Government section of the phone book.**

# If you live in Florida, you should know...

Black bears are at a crossroads in the Sunshine State. Since the 1980s, the bear population has been steadily expanding – along with the human population. As a result, bears and humans are encountering each other more than ever.

In fact, calls to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) concerning black bear encounters have increased from 10 in 1980 to more than 1,100 in 2000. Often these calls involve bears that have been fed by humans, either intentionally or unintentionally.

The mere presence of a black bear does not necessarily represent a problem. In fact, living in bear country can provide some unique and rewarding experiences for residents.

However, when black bears have access to pet food, garbage, bird seed, livestock feed, etc., they learn very quickly to associate people with food. Once they do, they lose their natural fear of people and may become a nuisance. This can lead to personal injury, property damage and the need to destroy

the problem bears.

People often ask why nuisance bears can't simply be relocated to the "wilderness where they won't bother anyone." Unfortunately, these types of remote areas are rare in Florida. In addition, relocation is stressful to bears and often places them in another bear's territory.

Often a relocated bear may try to return to its original home and in the process cross busy roads, creating a danger to itself and motorists. As a result, relocation is not a desirable or effective means of controlling nuisance bears.

The FWC is committed to ensuring the long-term well-being of the black bear, while addressing the property damage and safety concerns of residents and farmers. Wildlife biologists can provide technical advice to residents who live in bear country to help them take actions that will discourage bears from becoming a nuisance.

If a bear is threatening the safety of humans, pets or livestock, or is causing property damage, it is considered a nuisance and should be reported to the FWC.



# Discouraging bears at home

Properly storing or securing residential garbage and other bear attractants is a proven method for discouraging bears and preventing nuisance problems around homes, farms and neighborhoods.

The following items attract bears and should always be protected by an electric fence or stored in a secure place, such as a garage or sturdy shed:

Garbage Cans • Bird Feeders • Pet Food  
Squirrel and Other Wildlife Feeders • Pet  
Food Bowls • BBQ Grills and Smokers  
Pets and Small Livestock such as Goats,  
Rabbits, Pigs and Chickens • Livestock  
Feed • Compost Piles • Beehives • Fruit  
and Nut-Bearing Trees and Shrubs



**REMEMBER:** ANYTHING THAT ATTRACTS  
DOGS, CATS OR RACCOONS WILL ALSO ATTRACT  
BEARS! **ALSO, IT IS ILLEGAL TO INTENTIONALLY FEED  
BLACK BEARS IN FLORIDA.**

# The bear facts



Black bears are the only type of bear native to Florida and once roamed throughout the state's entire 34.5 million acres.



Human activities in Florida have eliminated bears from about 83 percent of their former range.



Florida bears are black with a brown muzzle and may have a white chest marking called a blaze.



Adult black bears typically weigh 150 to 400 pounds. The largest male bear on record in Florida weighed 624 pounds; the largest female weighed 342 pounds.



Female bears, called sows, begin breeding at about 3.5 years old and generally have one to four cubs every other year.



In Florida the breeding season runs from June to August, and cubs are born about seven months later in late January to early February.



Bears of all ages are excellent climbers and climb trees when they are frightened.



About 80 percent of a black bear's diet is plant matter (plants, berries, nuts, etc.). The other 20 percent includes insects and meat.

