

# Bears and You

## Tahoe National Forest

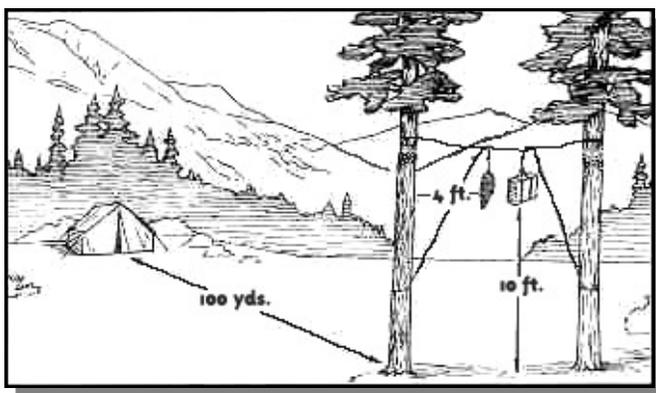


### General Information

You are in black bear habitat. Each year, hundreds of thousands of dollars of damage are done by bears in California. This damage is almost always the result of human carelessness. You can prevent this by using a bear proof storage locker or containers, if available. Hanging your items in a tree often does not deter black bears—they are excellent climbers. Properly storing food and other items will enhance your camping experience, and help protect bears.

### Lock up and hide your food

- DO NOT leave any food or food container unattended. Bears and other wildlife recognize ice chests, grocery bags and other food related supplies.
- DO NOT leave food or food containers visible in your vehicle. Keep storage containers latched at all times.
- Store all food, odorous items such as cosmetics, toothpaste, and suntan oil, and garbage in bear resistant containers or hang them at least 10 feet from the ground on a rope strung between two trees, leaving at least four feet of clear space from the nearest tree. Keep food at least 100 yards away from your sleeping area.
- DO NOT eat food or use cosmetics in or near your sleeping area at any time. Remember, it's the odor that attracts bears.



- During meals or snacks, stay close to your food and do not abandon it. Clean up when you're finished.
- Keep the inside of your vehicle clean. The smell or sight of even a stick of gum or any empty soda container is often enough to stimulate a bear to search further.
- If a bear does take your cooler or backpack, DO NOT attempt to retrieve it.

### Keep your camp clean

- If you decide to go for a hike, store your food properly, just as you would overnight. Bears are always looking for food at any time of the day.
- Remove all trash from your campsite and put it in animal-resistant containers.

### Respect the bear's rights

Remember, this area is their home. Recognize that *you* are the unnatural intrusion, and take steps to minimize your disruption to their natural existence.

- *Never try to pet a bear, or leave bait out in order to photograph them.* In addition to being a dangerous practice, leaving human foods out for any animal is unhealthy for them.
- *Never put yourself between a bear and food, their young, or their escape route.* It is much better to lose your food than be mauled. Confronting a bear is regarded as a threat, and they will take defensive measures.
- If you meet a bear, give it an opportunity to avoid you. Remember, bear attacks are very rare.
- If you see a bear at a distance, stay calm and talk in a normal tone of voice. Make sure it can see you are a human. Some bears will raise up or approach to see or smell you. If this occurs, yell, throw sticks, extend your arms to appear larger, but do not panic.
- Never approach a bear to photograph or observe it.
- Never offer food to any wild animal.

- If a bear approaches you, NEVER run or climb a tree. Black bears can run faster than you can, and are excellent climbers.

## Preventative measures

Bears will eat and/or chew on almost anything that is or could be food, as well as ice chests, car upholstery, tents, sleeping bags, etc., but there are a few things that bears don't like.

- Some people spread cayenne pepper in and around their camps, believing that the irritants in the pepper will annoy bears that sniff it.
- Some people place cups of household ammonia around their site. Apparently the odor irritates a bear sufficiently to keep it out of your site. This technique seems to work well.
- Store all odiferous items (food, trash, sunscreen, mosquito repellent, etc.) in bear lockers, bear canisters, or hang at least ten feet from the ground. (illustration on front page)
- Sleep at least 100 yards from food storage and cooking areas.
- Select a campsite away from berry patches, spawning streams and animal trails.
- Avoid hiking alone. As you walk, make your presence known by making noise, singing or using a bear bell. When hiking, look at the forest around you, not just at the trail ahead of you.

## Bear Biology

Bears are very intelligent and have a powerful sense of smell. It only takes one meal involving human food for a bear to establish a desire for human food for the rest of its life.

Black bears are omnivores and will eat everything that humans eat and more. They spend their days roaming the forest looking for food. Because they have a good memory they will always visit places where they have found food in the past. Trailheads and campgrounds are sometimes frequented by bears due to the carelessness of previous human visitors.

All bears have a powerful sense of smell that they use to lead them to food. Because they're so intelligent, a bear will quickly learn to associate certain non-food smells with food. All odors of human origin will signal bears that there may be food nearby. Cosmetics, toothpaste, hairspray, other toiletries, and baby goods are all important food cues to bears.

Bears are opportunists. They will use the easiest method possible to get a meal. Once they have located the food source they may use their long claws and powerful muscles to reach the food source. The same force and skill it takes to rip apart a log for grubs can be used to rip the door off of a vehicle or smash a window.

Bears that become accustomed to getting human foods tend to become aggressive, and can pose a danger to humans. These so-called "problem bears" are often killed to reduce the human risk, all because humans themselves didn't take common sense precautions.

## For More Information

Tahoe National Forest  
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TTY users dial 711 for relay service  
[www.fs.usda.gov/tahoe](http://www.fs.usda.gov/tahoe)

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