How to Discourage Bear Visits to Your Home

There are many things that can be done to minimize or eliminate the chances that bears will get into garbage or become a problem in the area. Any of the methods described below work best if implemented as soon as the problems start, or better still, before problems occur. Once a bear establishes a feeding pattern, it will take longer to encourage the bear to move on.

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**
- **Barbecue 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 South Carolina.

For more information go to www.dnr.sc.gov/wildlife/bear.

The Bear Facts

- **Black bear is the only bear species found in SC.**
- **A male's territory may have a radius of 10 miles; female's 4-5 miles.**
- **About 80 percent of a black bear's diet is plant matter (plants, berries, nuts, etc.). The other 20 percent includes insects and meat.**
- **Adult black bears typically weigh 180 to 350 pounds. The largest male bear on record in South Carolina weighed 594 pounds. Adult females average 150 pounds.**
- **Female bears, called sows, begin breeding at about 3.5 years old and generally have one to four cubs every other year.**
- **In South Carolina, 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.**

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A Homeowner's Guide Living with Bears

Be Bear Safe at Home...

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. Make yourself look as big as possible by waving arms, etc. Do not run from the bear or climb a tree.

No feeding – ***A bear that becomes accustomed to having food provided is an accident waiting to happen; don't feed a bear the first time and it will likely leave the area soon.***

No garbage – Keep garbage in tightly shut or bear-proof trash cans/dumpsters; garbage left in the open or in a vehicle is an open invitation for a bear. Bears have a tremendous sense of smell and may pry into your trunk or cab for food. A cup of ammonia in the bottom of cans works well to deter bears and other animals.

Pet food storage – Store pet food properly if kept outside; put pet food in airtight storage containers and don't leave leftover food out in the open.

Clean grills – Keep charcoal and gas grills covered and clean to keep food odors from attracting bears.

Bird feed & feeders – If a bear starts getting into your bird feeders – and they will if given the chance – take them down and put them away for a while; the bear will move on quickly.

Deer stands – If you live in a region of the state where baiting is allowed for deer, you may have to stop baiting your stand for a couple of weeks to insure the bear will move on.

Beehives – If you are going to have beehives in bear territory, protect your investment with an electric bear proof fence. Properly installed bear proof fences have more than a 90 percent success rate.

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?

As bear habitat becomes more fragmented and development of rural areas increases, encounters with bears will increase.

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

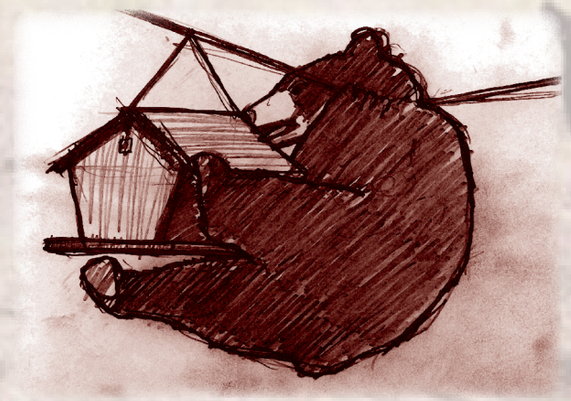
A bear may huff, snap its jaws and swat the ground. This behavior means the bear is uncomfortable and you are too close. Slowly back away. Do not run.

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 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. No injuries or deaths have been attributed to black bears in South Carolina.

In 2005 and 2006, there were over 50 bear-car collisions with the majority occurring in Horry County.



If you live in South Carolina, you should know...

Black bears once roamed the entire state of South Carolina. Today there are two resident bear populations found in the mountains and northern plain. As the human population continues to increase and development encroaches on bear habitat, encounters between bears and humans have become more frequent.

In fact, calls to the S.C. Department of Natural Resources (DNR) concerning black bear encounters have increased from 20 in 1990 to more than 250 in 2006. 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.

Bears will naturally investigate food odors and are attracted to many different foods such as garbage, birdseed and suet, pet foods, compost piles, and grease on barbecue grills. Once a bear receives a "reward" such as one of these foods, it may return to the same area several times (even after food is removed) or search around the general area for similar foods. Therefore the solution to most bear problems is to remove the source of attraction before conflicts occur. In South Carolina, it is illegal to entice bears by any means. The law states that you must take away the attractants when bears are coming to your yard.

Most bear problems in residential areas are temporary and usually occur in the spring, summer, and late fall months. Between the time bears emerge from their dens and summer foods such as berries ripen, natural food supplies are low and not very nutritious. This causes bears to travel more in search of food. Also, breeding season occurs from June to August, and male bears tend to roam more in search of mates. During the same time period, young males are dispersing to new territories and often wander into residential areas. Finally, late fall marks the time when bears are searching for food to create fat stores to last them through the winter. By keeping food away from bears during those times of increased travel, many problems may be avoided.

People often ask why problem bears can't simply be relocated. There are several reasons why moving problem bears is not an option. First and foremost, moving a bear does not address the problem. If the problem is not fixed, other bears will move in to take advantage of the food source, or the bear that was moved away may return and become a problem once more. Second, catching a wild animal such as a bear puts both the bear and people at risk of injury. Third, most people wish to keep bears as a viable species in South Carolina, and if bear and humans are going to coexist, human attitudes and habits must change. Finally, there are no longer areas that are sufficiently remote to ensure that a relocated bear will not encounter other residences and possibly become a nuisance there.

Black bears are an important part of South Carolina's fauna. The DNR is committed to ensuring the long-term well being of the black bear, while addressing the property damage and safety concerns of residents. 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.

The key to coexisting with bears is understanding and respecting them, and following the rules and regulations aimed to protect the public and bears.