What To Do if You See a Bear

Don’t panic. Bears are more likely to be afraid of you than you are of them. Enjoy the privilege of seeing a magnificent wild animal, but don’t lose sight of the fact that bears are powerful animals that will defend themselves if they feel threatened.

Never approach, surround or attempt to touch a bear. Always leave a clear escape route for a bear.

If you feel threatened by a bear, back away slowly, but do not run. If the bear won’t leave, make loud noises—yell, clap, blow car horns or air horns, or drum on nearby objects.

Relocating Bears

Once a bear has become a problem, DEC staff are often asked to move it. Unfortunately, that rarely solves the problem. Relocated bears have been known to travel up to 300 miles to return to where they were caught. Bears that don’t return may continue their bad behavior at the new location. Circumstances that led to the original problem must be corrected, or human-bear conflicts will persist. The simplest way to avoid problems with bears is to remove all unnatural food sources.

The Bear Facts

New York State has a healthy population of approximately 8,000 black bears (*Ursus americanus*).

- The average adult male bear weighs about 300 lbs.; females weigh about 160 lbs.
- Black bears are New York’s second-largest land mammal, after moose.
- Females have a litter of two to three cubs every other year, although litters of four are not unusual.
- Preferred natural foods include nuts, roots, fruit, plants and insects. Bears scavenge dead animals but rarely feed on live prey.
- The simplest way to avoid problems with bears is to remove all unnatural food sources.

For further information regarding black bears in New York State, visit us online:

[www.dec.ny.gov/animals/6960.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/6960.html)

Living with Bears

In New York State, people and black bears often live in the same areas. With frequent bear encounters nearly inevitable, it’s important to know how to handle such encounters safely.
Prevent Problems with Bears

Properly storing and disposing of garbage and removing birdfeeders when bears are active are the most important steps you can take to significantly reduce nuisance bear problems in your area. Garbage and birdseed are favorite—but unnatural—foods of bears, and bears often choose them instead of their natural food sources, so limiting their accessibility is critical. Take these precautions:

- Never feed bears intentionally; it is illegal.
- Burning garbage is illegal and attracts bears, as does composting food scraps.
- Store garbage in lidded cans or dumpsters, and keep them in a secure place, such as a garage or shed. Put garbage out only on the morning of pickup.
- Feed birds only from December 1 until April 1; however, birdseed and suet may attract bears at any time of the year. Remove feeders, seed, and suet whenever bears are problematic.

All Types of Smells Attract Bears

Although birdfeeders and unsecured garbage cans may start the problem, other less obvious food sources can attract them too. Take these precautions as well:

- Clean barbeque grills after every use; remove the grease can, and run the grill on “high” to burn off excess grease.
- Store your grill in a secure place when not in use.
- Feed pets indoors.
- Keep refrigerators and freezers in a secure place, and bring coolers inside when not in use.
- Protect livestock and beehives with electric fencing. For more information on this, contact your regional DEC wildlife office.

Bear Problems Affect Entire Communities

Communication and cooperation among everyone in your neighborhood is the only effective way to address such problems. Once bears learn to associate a specific location with food, they return to it repeatedly. Bears that have found food at one house may look for it at other houses. Bears that become comfortable around people and houses are more likely to cause problems and damage property. Some bears may even be killed because of ongoing dangerous or destructive behavior.