

Living with Bears

Adopted from the Missouri Dept. of Conservation

Start with Prevention

Black bears are naturally shy and scared of humans but they may tolerate contact with people in their search for food. In suburban areas, for example, bears may overcome their fear of people when they discover bird feeders or a readily available supply of pet food.



Precautions should be taken to avoid confrontations and loss before bear damage occurs. The most effective and long-lasting success will be achieved through damage prevention rather than responding to a bear that already has discovered a food source. Bears learn rapidly and if their activities are rewarded by food, then barriers or harassment techniques will be less effective.

Never intentionally feed bears! Feeding makes them lose their fear of being around people and usually results in the bears having to be destroyed

How to identify the presence of black bears

The first step in solving a damage problem is to be sure bears, and not some other animals, are the cause. See the biology sheet for details.

Prevention of common problems

Bee hives

Preventing black bear damage:

- Keep mowed, cleared corridors around hive sites.
- Avoid placing hives in abandoned areas or near wooded, overgrown locations.
- Locate hives as close together as possible because they are easier to protect.
- Don't attract bears to your property by feeding them or providing supplemental food.
- Erect temporary or permanent electric fencing.



Identifying black bear damage:

- Hives are knocked over, scattered and torn apart.
- Honeycombs or larvae have been destroyed or consumed.

NOTE: Skunks and raccoon also may destroy bee hives. However, their tracks and feces are much smaller and the extent of their damage is less destructive than that of a bear.

Livestock and other domestic animals

Preventing black bear damage:

- Avoid pasturing livestock in abandoned locations, areas with heavy cover or fields adjacent to corridors used by bears.
- Do not leave carcasses of dead livestock exposed. Bury or incinerate them completely.
- Avoid feeding bears or providing supplemental food on your property that might attract bears.
- When possible, pen livestock near or in the barn at night, particularly pregnant animals and those with young. Because afterbirth material attracts bears, coyotes and other predators, it is a good idea to provide a place in a barn for livestock to give birth. If this is not possible, clear pastures and fields of all afterbirth material.



Identifying black bear damage:

- Livestock surviving a bear attack will often show tooth marks on the neck at the base of the skull or long, 1/2-inch wide claw marks on the shoulders. Livestock that have succumbed to a bear attack often will have a broken neck or back as a result of blows from the bear's paws.
- Bears will often drag or carry a carcass away from the kill site, catch it, and return regularly to feed on it.
- Bears often will strip back or reverse the skin of larger prey, particularly along the back, and lick the meat from the bones. They do not normally eat the bones and skin. The udder of lactating female prey is highly preferred by bears and often will be eaten first.
- Inexperienced bears might expose the intestines, but muscle tissue usually is preferred and consumed.

NOTE: Care must be taken to distinguish bear damage from that of other carnivores, especially coyotes and domestic dogs. Coyotes usually kill their prey with bites to the neck, and feed on internal organs and hindquarters first rather than on the back or shoulders. Coyotes and dogs will not make long, 1/2 inch wide claw marks on the body. Also, coyotes and dogs usually do not strip back the prey's skin, but they will eat and chew the bones.

Orchards



Preventing black bear damage:

- Keep mowed, open corridors around the orchard and in the trees.
- Don't attract bears by feeding or providing supplemental food.
- Put up an electric fence.
- Use guard dogs to discourage bears from coming into the orchard.

Identifying black bear damage:

- Small trees are stripped of branches or mature trees have large limbs broken in the tops.
- Claw marks may be seen 4 1/2 to 6 feet above the ground.

Corn and sorghum crops

Preventing black bear damage:

- Keep mowed, open corridors around and between fields.
- Don't attract bears to your property by feeding them or providing supplemental food.



Identifying black bear damage:

- Look for large, circular patches within the field's interior where stalks have been pulled inward and flattened or broken.
- Ears of corn will be completely eaten or cleaned of kernels. More plants may be damaged than are actually consumed.
- The damage occurs at the milk-stage of development.

NOTE: Take extra care to check held signs because a wide variety of animals damage corn. Raccoons often pull down stalks, strip the husks and will chew kernels from an ear, but normally do not cause the large circular patches of damage. Other animals such as deer and coyotes, will nip at the ears and silk, while beavers will chew, fell and remove the stalks.

Trash receptacles

Preventing black bear damage:

- Empty trash cans as often and wash with a scented disinfectant to reduce the food odors.
- Keep trash containers inside at night. Place trash and garbage outside only on the day of pickup.
- Outdoors, use large trash bins that have metal, lockable lids.
- Keep lids locked at night. a Secure large, outdoor trash bins so they cannot be turned over.
- Empty large, outdoor trash bins at least once a week and wash with disinfectant.

Identify black bear damage:

- Trash containers are knocked over and the contents scattered.
- Large, outdoor trash bins are turned over with garbage, plastic bags and wrappers sometimes carried 100 yards away and scattered.

Campgrounds

Preventing black bear damage:

- Keep your campsite clean and free of food odor, wash cookware and remove garbage daily.
- Do not leave garbage in the camp overnight.
- Pack food in closed containers and place them in your car or other secure place.
- When backpacking, place food in plastic or burlap bags and suspend over tree limbs at least 5 feet from the nearest tree trunk, and at least 12 feet above the ground each night.



Identifying black bear damage:

- Food containers are broken into, and items are scattered about.
- Trash receptacles are raided.