

Facts

- There are eight bear **species** in the world, three of which can be found in the USA (polar, brown/grizzly and black).
- There are two bear species in **Washington State** (grizzly & black).
- Fewer than 1100 **grizzly bears** (*Ursus arctos*) remain in the lower 48 states where they are considered *threatened*. In Washington, they occur in the Cascade Mountains (as far south as Mount Rainier) and the Selkirs. There are thought to be fewer than 30.
- Black bears** (*Ursus americanus*) are more common – there are at least 25,000 in Washington where they occur throughout all forested habitats. This places it in the top five lower 48 States for black bear numbers.
- Although scientifically classified as *carnivores*, bears are opportunistic omnivores: about 95% of their diet is vegetation, but they eat a wide variety of foods depending upon what is available.
- Washington’s black bears vary in **color** from black through cinnamon to blonde!
- Average adult male black bears **weigh** 250 pounds, while females average 140 pounds. Grizzly bears can be double this.
- In Washington, you are most likely to **see bears** between March and December.
- Bears will generally **avoid humans**, but might be attracted to a backyard or campsite by the odor of food from a barbecue, garbage can, bird feeder, pet food or outdoor refrigerator.
- Bears are **strong** – they have been known to bend open car doors in their search for food!



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Grizzly bear eating horsetail plant

© John Hechtel



Black bear eating grass

© Michael Madel

The Subject of this Safety Guide

What is a nuisance bear?

A bear is considered a *nuisance* when it becomes used to finding human food and garbage in areas where people live or recreate. Carelessly stored food, garbage, even barbecue grease and bird feeders can all attract bears and keep them coming back. The outcome is often a dead bear and even orphaned cubs. This problem can easily be solved by eliminating the source of the attraction. Becoming **Bear Safe** is as easy as following the simple steps outlined in this safety guide... enjoy learning about bears and how to live with them safely.

© Scott Stonum



Black bear in apple tree

Bear Safe is a program of educational activities designed to reduce conflicts between bears and humans by fostering an understanding of bears and an acceptance of them as a desired part of our wilderness.

In Washington, the program is directed and implemented by Insight Wildlife Management with funding and support from the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) through ‘Libearty – the world campaign for bears.’

For more information about Bear Safe and other research and education activities please contact:

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Grizzly Bear Outreach Project (GBOP)
www.bearinfo.org

To make a charitable donation or find out about other WSPA activities please contact:

WSPA, 34 Deloss Street, Framingham, MA 01702
Tel: 1-800-883-9772
Web page: www.wspa-usa.org

For additional copies of this safety guide please contact IWM or WSPA.
Content approved by **Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife** (www.wdfw.wa.gov)

Design: Chris Morgan, Erik Peterson & Erin Divine, IWM & North Woods Graphics (1-800-670-7635)
Printing: Towner Press (1-888-877-8870)

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Bear

Conflicts

True or false?

1. “A bear that stands on its hind legs is preparing to charge”.
2. “A bear’s sense of smell is better than a dog’s”.
3. “Bears are naturally aggressive towards humans”.
4. “The best way to get away from an aggressive bear is by running”.
5. “Bears cannot run downhill”.
6. “When hiking in bear country, it is good to make noise to warn any bears of your presence”.



© Chris Weston (www.naturalphotographic.com)

Grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos*)



© Michael Madel

Black bear (*Ursus americanus*)

- All over the world, bears compete with humans for space, which can lead to **conflict**.
- Every year in the USA, more people move into bear **habitat**, and many are not sufficiently prepared to deal with their wild neighbors.
- Every year in the USA, thousands of ‘nuisance’ bears have to be relocated or killed unnecessarily due to **careless** human behavior.
- Washington supports a large number of black bears, a small number of grizzly bears, and a rapidly growing human population.**
- When humans carelessly leave food out, near a home or in a camp, bears see it as an easy meal and may become **‘food-conditioned’**.
- Food-conditioned bears associate humans, camps and homes with food rewards - they become **nuisance** animals when they repeatedly return for these rewards.
- Nuisance bears must be captured and relocated to another area (which rarely works) or euthanized to prevent them from becoming an increased danger to people.
- Remember: **A FED BEAR IS A DEAD BEAR**.
- It is up to us to learn how to live with bears and other **wildlife**.
- You can protect yourself, your family, belongings and bears by following the **simple steps** in this safety guide.



© Michael Madel

Garbage makes an accessible, but lethal meal for bears

This guide folds out into a poster which includes important information about safety in bear country. Keep it with you while backpacking, or display it in your home.

Thank you for picking up this safety guide. Whether you want to know how to discourage bears from wandering onto your property, how to camp sensitively in bear country or just find out more about living with these amazing creatures, read on to become **Bear Safe**.

There are two bear species in Washington State and the **grizzly bear**. The safety issues in this guide are relevant to both species, although black bears are far more numerous than grizzly bears (for every grizzly bear in the state there are about 800 black bears). If you are lucky enough to spot a very rare grizzly bear, please call: 1-888-WOLF-BEAR or go to www.bearinfo.org. This will help us to learn more about the distribution of this elusive mammal in Washington.



© John Serrao 507-894-9791

A black bear’s home range often includes areas frequented by humans

How can you tell the difference between a grizzly and a black bear?

1. The front **claws** on a grizzly bear are as long as a human finger (for digging). Black bear claws are much shorter (for climbing trees).
2. The facial **profile** of a grizzly is *dished* or *concave*, whereas black bears have straighter *roman noses*.
3. The muscular **shoulder hump** is much more pronounced on a grizzly than on a black bear.
4. Color or size can **not** be used for identification as both species vary greatly.

For more ID tips go to: www.bearinfo.org/id.htm

FALSE. Bears can run faster than any human – in any direction.

FALSE. Bears can run as fast as a racehorse for short distances, and running may trigger their chase response. For the best course of action see the poster inside this guide.

FALSE. Bears can run away from an aggressive bear is by running”.

TRUE. In fact, it is one of the most sensitive noses in the animal world.

FALSE. Bears are shy, retiring creatures who only act aggressively as a last resort – usually when they feel threatened.

The Bear Necessities

Bears and humans – living together in rural areas of Washington State

Bears are an amazing part of our wild heritage. If we can learn to live alongside these incredible animals, we will preserve the wilderness that makes Washington so special.

Try to look at your home or campsite from a bear’s perspective. Use the guidelines below to help make life safer for bears *and* people.

Don't let YOUR carelessness cause the unnecessary death of a bear.

At your home

Garbage disposal/storage

- ☐ Don't leave food, scraps, garbage or pet food out for bears.
- ☐ Store garbage indoors or in bear-resistant garbage cans.
- ☐ Haul garbage to a dump site at least twice a week to avoid odors.
- ☐ If you have a pickup service, put garbage out an hour or two before the truck arrives – not the night before.
- ☐ If you're leaving several days before pickup, haul your garbage to a dump.
- ☐ Be particularly aware of very odorous food scraps such as fish and meat bones – store them in the freezer until garbage day.

Barbecuing

- ☐ Be alert when barbecuing. If bears are nearby, they may be attracted by the smell.
- ☐ Keep barbecue grills clean and free from grease. Store inside if possible.

Pets

- ☐ It is better to keep pets inside at night if possible.
- ☐ Do not leave pet food outside.

More helpful tips

- ☐ Composts, fruit trees and beehives are powerful bear attractants – enclose them with chain link or electric fencing.
- ☐ Don't put fish, meat or fruit into your compost. Use lime to reduce odors.
- ☐ Make sure that bird feeders, bird seed, suet and hummingbird mixes are not accessible to an inquisitive bear.
- ☐ Try to pick fruit from trees on your property regularly. Rotting fruit left on the ground is a powerful bear attractant.
- ☐ Avoid the use of outdoor refrigerators – they will attract bears.

When hiking

Seeing and avoiding bears

If you spend much time in the rural areas of Washington, the chances of seeing a black bear are quite reasonable. You are less likely to see a very rare grizzly bear. Watching bears in their natural environment from a safe, respectable distance can be incredibly thrilling. Positive experiences are far more common than negative ones. Although extremely rare, aggressive meetings between people and bears ('encounters') sometimes occur. To avoid them:

- ☐ Hike in a group and during daylight hours.
- ☐ If a bear hears you coming, it will usually avoid you. Bears feel threatened if surprised. Talk or sing songs as you walk – especially in dense brush where visibility is limited, near running water or when the wind is in your face. Your voice will help bears to identify you as human.
- ☐ Be aware. Learn about and watch for bear sign. Overturned rocks or broken-up, rotten logs can be a sign that a bear has been foraging for grubs or insects. Claw marks on trees, five-toed tracks in the dirt or snow, berries on the ground, plant root diggings or fur on the bark of trees are all signs that a bear has been in the area.
- ☐ Stay away from abundant food sources and dead animals – bears may be foraging in the area or protecting a carcass.
- ☐ Keep dogs on a leash and under control. Dogs may be helpful in detecting bears, but they may also fight with them or lead them back to you.
- ☐ Avoid wearing scented cosmetics and hair products. Carry bear deterrent pepper spray.

© Brad Garfield
www.bradgarfield.com

At your campsite

Camp setup

- ☐ *First: be aware of your surroundings – look at them from a bear's perspective.* Investigate your site before setting up camp and then establish a clean camp that is free from odors.
- ☐ Avoid camping next to trails or streams as bears and other wildlife use these as travel routes.
- ☐ Avoid camping near bear food sources such as berries. Never camp near an animal carcass, garbage or bear sign such as tracks, scat or tree scratchings.
- ☐ Remember the 100 yard rule: locate your cook area and food cache at least 100 yards downwind from your tent.
- ☐ Pitch tents in a line or a semicircle facing your cooking areas. You will be more likely to spot a bear that wanders into your camp and it will have a clear escape route.

Food storage

- ☐ Don't forget! When caching your food and garbage you'll need: 100 feet of strong nylon accessory cord (1/8 inch minimum) and a carabiner (to attach bags to cord).
 - ☐ Never leave food unattended, unless it is properly stored.
 - ☐ DO NOT bring food or odorous non-food items into your tent. This includes toothpaste, perfume, deodorant, chocolate, candy and wrappers.
 - ☐ Avoid canned foods with strong odors such as tuna. Wash cans after eating.
 - ☐ Food should be placed in bear-resistant food storage containers (where available) or stored in your vehicle.
 - ☐ Where this is not possible, cache your food: place food inside several layers of sealed plastic bags (to reduce odor) and a stuff-sac ('bear bags' or waterproof 'dry-bags' can be purchased for this use), find two trees that are 20 feet apart and hang the bags between them at least 15 feet from the ground using nylon cord and a carabiner. Some campgrounds provide communal bear wires for this purpose.
 - ☐ If two trees are not available, sling your bags at least 15 feet from the ground over the branch of one tree so that they hang at least 5 feet out from the tree trunk.
 - ☐ Remember to hang pots, utensils, cosmetics, toiletries and any other odorous items with your food and garbage.
 - ☐ Bear resistant food containers (BRFCs) can help effective food and garbage storage and can be borrowed from some National Park and Forest Service offices.

Cooking

- ☐ NEVER cook or eat in your tent – it will smell of food and may attract bears. Avoid cooking greasy, odorous foods.
- ☐ Locate your cook area and food cache at least 100 yards downwind from your tent.
- ☐ Remove the clothing you wore while cooking before going to sleep. Store these clothes in your vehicle or with your food and garbage (see above).
- ☐ Wash all dishes immediately after eating. Dump water at least 100 yards from your campsite.

Garbage disposal/storage

- ☐ Never leave garbage unattended, unless it is properly stored.
- ☐ Do not bury your garbage.
- ☐ Garbage should be deposited in bear-resistant garbage cans or stored in your vehicle until it can be dumped.
- ☐ Where this is not possible, hang garbage in the same way as food (see above).
- ☐ Remember: "pack it in, pack it out". This includes ALL garbage (including biodegradable items such as fruit peel).

Bear encounters

Encounters with aggressive bears are extremely rare. Attacks are even rarer. Many thousands of people live, work and recreate in the bear country of Washington and many experience the excitement of seeing bears, yet only one fatality by a black bear and no fatalities by a grizzly bear have been recorded here. The tips in this safety guide will help prevent bear-human conflicts, but it is always good to be prepared for an encounter. There is no fool-proof way of dealing with a bear encounter (each bear and encounter is different) but the following responses have worked in the past:

If you see a bear in the distance...

- ☐ Respect the bear's need for space – try to make a wide detour or leave the area.

If you suddenly encounter a bear at close range...

- ☐ STOP. Assess the situation.
- ☐ Bears may act defensively if startled, or if protecting cubs or a food cache.
- ☐ Remain calm. Do not run. Identify yourself as human by talking in low tones, with arms outstretched. Move upwind so that the bear can catch your scent. Don't crowd the bear - leave it a clear escape route and it will probably exit.
- ☐ The bear may appear agitated and stressed, 'popping' its jaws or swatting the ground while blowing and snorting. Watch the bear but avoid direct eye contact.
- ☐ A bear may charge in an attempt to intimidate you – usually stopping well short of contact.
- ☐ If a bear actually attacks in a 'sudden encounter' situation (highly unlikely with black bears), you should lie flat on your stomach with your legs spread slightly apart. Lock your fingers behind your head. This position will protect your face and neck. Remain still. Once the bear senses that you are no longer a threat, it will usually leave the area.

If a bear follows you...

- ☐ STOP. Assess the situation.
- ☐ Bears very rarely exhibit *predatory* behavior (following you before attacking). If a bear follows you, stand your ground. Try to be intimidating - make lots of noise, appear as large as possible, throw rocks and sticks. Let the bear know that you will fight back if attacked and that you are not easy prey. Do not run.
- ☐ If the bear continues to follow, place your pack or other item down as a distraction. If it is a grizzly bear, climbing a tree may be an option but it is no guarantee of safety.
- ☐ During an offensive, predatory attack such as this you should fight back.
- ☐ Carry bear deterrent pepper spray – it may help in an encounter with a potentially aggressive bear.

More safety information at... www.bearinfo.org/bearsafety.htm

If you need to report an incident... please notify your local State Patrol Office.

Report grizzly bear observations... 1-888-WOLF-BEAR or www.bearinfo.org/sighting.htm



Produced for the Bear Safe Washington program by:
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With funding and support from:
World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA)
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Photographs kindly provided by:
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Remember, bears are *far* more likely to *enhance* your wilderness experience than spoil it. Knowing how to interpret their behavior and act responsibly is part of the thrill of sharing forests and mountains with these amazing creatures.