

L I V I N G I N  
**BEAR  
COUNTRY**

Guidelines for protecting  
people, property and bears



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## About Defenders of Wildlife

Defenders of Wildlife is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to the protection of all native animals and plants in their natural communities.

Visit our Web site: [www.defenders.org](http://www.defenders.org).



Defenders of Wildlife  
140 South 4th Street West, Suite 1  
Missoula, Montana 59801  
406.549.4103

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Defenders of Wildlife  
1130 17th Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20036-4604  
202.682.9400

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[www.mangelsen.com](http://www.mangelsen.com)

*If we can learn to live with bears, especially the grizzly, and if we can learn to accommodate the needs of bears in their natural environment, then maybe we can also find ways to use the finite resources of our continent and still maintain some of the diversity and natural beauty that were here when Columbus arrived."*

—Stephen Herrero,  
author of "Bear Attacks:  
Their Causes and  
Avoidance" and a  
recognized authority  
on bear behavior

**W**ild beauty, wide-open spaces, abundant wildlife—these are the benefits of living in the northern Rocky Mountains. With these benefits, however, come the responsibilities of minimizing our impact on the natural ecosystem. Learning to co-exist with bears is one such responsibility.



THOMAS D. MANGELSEN/MANGELSEN.COM

*Keeping bears like these grizzly cubs wary and wild requires the cooperation of the people who share their habitat.*

As the human population of the northern Rockies area has increased, so have our interactions with black bears and grizzlies – sometimes with unfortunate results. Many bears have become so used to our presence in their world, they have lost their natural wariness of us. Reward this behavior with something to eat even once, and we end up with bears that associate us with food. Such bears will aggressively seek hand-outs and follow their noses to developed areas for the unnatural sustenance we unwittingly provide for them in the form of garbage, compost piles, pet food, livestock feed, fruit trees, vegetable gardens, bird seed and other items found near our residences. In pursuit of an easy meal, these bears can damage property and injure people.

Wildlife managers called in to deal with a “problem” bear may try relocating it or discouraging it by using pepper spray, firing rubber bullets

or deploying specially trained bear dogs. If these methods fail, however, killing the bear is usually the only other option.

Research on breaking bears of the human-related food habit continues, but at present wildlife experts concur: A human-fed bear, more often than not, ends up dead. Throughout the northern Rockies, incidental feeding by humans contributes to many grizzly and black bear deaths. As a resident of bear country you can help prevent wild bears from becoming mortality statistics. Simply follow the guidelines presented in this booklet and encourage your neighbors to do the same.

*This grizzly killed by wildlife officials is one of the many bears destroyed each year because of our carelessness.*



JEFF HENRY/ROCHE JAUNE PICTURES

## Dispose of garbage properly.

### Don't let garbage pile up or develop strong odors that can attract bears.

Minimize odors by keeping garbage inside the house or another secured area in tightly closed plastic trash bags. Stash food scraps, especially meat, fish and fruit by-products, in the freezer in an airtight container or wrapped in newspaper until trash collection day.

**Put garbage and recyclables out for collection in bear-resistant containers.** Plastic and metal trash cans with fitted lids and dumpsters with sliding doors or lift-up lids are not bear-resistant. Bear-resistant trash and recycling containers feature sturdy construction and self-closing mailbox-top-style lids and are designed to be secured permanently to prevent toppling. Your local garbage service may require you to use such containers and may even provide them. Fifty-five-gallon steel drums with locking-ring lids are a less expensive alternative. Ask your state wildlife agency where you can purchase them. If you don't have a bear-resistant container, keep garbage and recyclables in the house or a secured area such as a roofed enclosure with bear-resistant fencing until close to pick-up time on trash day.

When garbage is no longer accessible at one house, bears will move on to the next, so encourage your neighbors to handle their garbage properly, too.

For comprehensive information on living with predators, including sources of bear-resistant products, visit the Living with Wildlife Foundation Web site:  
[www.lwwf.org](http://www.lwwf.org)

**Don't discard cooking grease in your yard.** Collect it in a glass, plastic or metal container with a lid. When ready to dispose of it, transfer it to a plastic bag, seal the bag tightly and place it in a bear-resistant container.

## Be bear-aware when cooking and eating outside.

**Don't leave any food or beverage—including unopened canned items—outside or even on a screened porch.** Bring all dishes, containers, utensils and uneaten food inside as soon as you are finished eating.

**Promptly and properly discard or recycle soda cans, used paper plates, cups, disposable containers and napkins.** Anything that has been used to hold or cook food and beverages (especially sugary ones) can attract bears.

**Don't leave food cooking outside unattended.** Bears have been known to snatch sizzling steaks right off the grill.

**Clean outdoor cookers and coolers thoroughly after each use.** Burn off any remaining food particles and scrub the grease from grills, smokers and other outdoor cookers. If cooking over an open fire, remove any unburned food or scraps from the fire pit.

**Store outdoor cookers and coolers inside if possible.** Even clean grills and empty coolers may retain trace odors that entice bears. And bears that have had a taste of what coolers and grills can offer will investigate these potential food sources whenever they come across them.

**Don't leave scented products outside.** Bears will sample anything that smells good, even nonfood items such as suntan lotion, insect repellent, soap and candles.



JESS R. LEE/JESSLEEPHOTOS.COM

*Attracted by strong odors from food, garbage or other scented items, a black bear and her cubs attempt a break-in.*

## Make your property bear-resistant.

**Vehicles:** Don't leave trash, groceries or animal feed in your vehicle. Bears can and do pry open car and truck doors and break windows to get at food or coolers and other items they associate with food.

**Porches, Windows and Other Entrances:** Keep doors and windows closed and locked. Food smells can lure bears inside. If you must keep a freezer or refrigerator outdoors, secure it to the wall and padlock the doors so bears can't knock it over and open it. Outdoor lighting can also be used to deter bears from approaching buildings.

**Lawns:** Keep your lawn mowed and weeded. Grasses, dandelions and clover are natural bear foods. Keep the landscape open in the area surrounding your house.

**Gardens:** Consider electric fencing if you have a garden. Vegetable gardens, especially those containing potatoes and root vegetables such as carrots and beets, attract bears. Flower gardens are not as attractive to bears as long they don't contain sweet vetch, dandelions or clover. Never use blood meal as a fertilizer or deer repellent in any type of garden.

**Compost Piles:** If you must have a compost pile, enclose it with electric fencing. Don't put meat, fish, melon rinds and other pungent scraps in the pile. Better yet, compost only leaves and grass, not kitchen scraps. Keep the pile aerated and properly turned. Add lime to promote decomposition and reduce odor.

**Fruit Trees and Berry-Producing Shrubs:** It's best not to have shrubs and fruit-bearing trees, which bears can climb and destroy. However, if you do have apple, crabapple, chokecherry or other fruit trees or berry bushes and don't wish to replace them with varieties that don't attract bears, install electric fencing. Pick fruit as soon as it ripens (or before if you're not going to use it right away). Remove any fruit that has fallen to the ground as soon as possible.

**Bird Feeders:** Don't put out any type of bird feeder during the period bears are active, mid-March to mid-November. (Birds don't need supplemental feeding at this time anyway.) This includes suet feeders, peanut butter feeders, all

types of seed feeders and hummingbird feeders. At a minimum, make feeders unavailable by hanging them at least 10 feet from the ground and four feet from any supporting post or tree trunk. Better yet, take bird feeders down and bring them in at night. Regularly pick up all waste seed, hulls and shells, or use only shelled seeds and nuts. Store all birdseed indoors.

**Salt and Mineral Blocks:** Don't set out salt and mineral blocks to attract wildlife to your yard, because bears are among the animals you will attract.

**Pets:** Don't leave pets unattended outside, especially at night or when a bear is known to be in the area. Store pet food inside. Consider feeding pets (and livestock) at midday so they are finished eating before dusk. Bring pet food bowls inside as soon as pets are finished eating. Don't leave bones and scented chew toys laying around your yard.

**Beehives:** Install electric fencing around hives.

**Livestock:** Bears usually don't bother horses, adult cattle or llamas; however, calves, goats and especially sheep, pigs, chickens and geese are vulnerable. To keep bears out of corrals and chicken coops, install electric fencing.

Store all livestock feed in a secured area or in bear-resistant containers. If an animal dies, remove the body from your property as soon as possible. Haul it to the landfill, have a rendering service pick it up or bury it at least eight to 10 feet deep in a remote spot on your land. Don't dump an animal carcass on public property or leave it near any developed area.

### **Funding for efforts to prevent conflicts with grizzly bears and reimbursement for verified losses of livestock to grizzly bears is available.**

Defenders of Wildlife administers The Bailey Wildlife Foundation Proactive Carnivore Conservation Fund, which provides financial assistance for electric fencing and other preventive measures. For more information:

**Defenders of Wildlife**  
**406.549.4103**

[www.defenders.org/proactive](http://www.defenders.org/proactive)

Defenders also administers The Bailey Wildlife Foundation Grizzly Compensation Trust, which reimburses citizens for verified losses of livestock to grizzly bears in Idaho and Montana, except in the greater Yellowstone ecosystem, where grizzlies are no longer listed under the Endangered Species Act. (Wyoming has its own state compensation program). If you believe a grizzly bear has killed livestock on your property, call one of the following agencies to investigate:

**Idaho Fish and Game Department**  
**Check listings for nearest regional office.**

**Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks**  
**Yellowstone Area: 406.994.4042**  
**Western Montana: 406.466.5100**

**Wyoming Game and Fish Department**  
**800.442.4331**

**U.S.D.A. Wildlife Services**  
**Idaho: 208.239.6921**  
**Montana: 406.458.0106 or 657.6464**

**Blackfeet Fish and Wildlife Department**  
**406.338.7207**

**Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes**  
**Wildlife Management Program**  
**406.675.2700**

**Shoshone and Arapaho Fish and Game**  
**800.284.6857**

## Know how to tell a black bear from a grizzly bear.

Although the grizzly is more powerful and assertive, both black bears and grizzlies can be dangerous to humans. Get to know the distinguishing characteristics of the two species so you'll know which one you're dealing with should you encounter a bear. Size and color are not sufficient to make a positive identification. Size is relative, and both species range in color from black to blond. More reliable distinguishing features include:

**Head shape:** Grizzly bears have a concave (dished) profile. Black bears have a relatively straight profile from the forehead to the tip of the nose.

**Ear size and shape:** Grizzly bears have smaller, more rounded ears. The ears of the black bear are larger, more erect and more pointed.

**Shoulder hump:** Grizzly bears have prominent shoulder humps on their backs formed by the powerful muscles of their forelegs. Black bears usually do not have distinctive shoulder humps.

**Claws:** Grizzly bears have long, slightly curved, more obvious claws. Black bears have shorter, more curved claws.

**Front Paw Tracks:** Imagine a straight line drawn from the bottom of the big toe to the little, or fifth, toe. In grizzlies, all the toe prints will be above the line. In black bears, half to all of the fifth toe will be below the line.

## BLACK BEAR



COREL CORP

### BLACK BEAR TRACKS



## GRIZZLY BEAR



NPS PHOTO

### GRIZZLY BEAR TRACKS



## Know what to do if there's a bear in your yard.

**Report all bear sightings and incidents on your property to your local wildlife agency.** If it's a grizzly bear, call immediately.

**If you are certain the bear is a black bear, encourage it to leave.** Bang on pots and pans or make other loud noises. (Boat air horns work well.) The more stressful a bear's encounter with you is, the less likely it is to come back.

**If you unexpectedly encounter a bear in your yard, walk, don't run, away.** Move slowly. If the bear is a grizzly with cubs, don't make eye contact, and don't get between her and her cubs or threaten the cubs in any way. If the bear charges, stand your ground. Bears commonly "bluff charge," stopping within a few feet.

If a grizzly continues to come at you, lie face flat on the ground, hands clasped around the back of your neck, and play dead. In this nonthreatening position, a bear will likely leave you alone or, at worst, paw you and inflict only minor, superficial injuries.

**Keep bear spray handy.** Always have a canister of bear spray (at least eight ounces) on your belt and near the front and back doors of your house. Make sure it is an EPA-registered bear spray with one to two percent capsaicin and related capsaicinoids, a spray duration of at least six seconds and a range of 25 feet. Familiarize yourself with the directions for using the spray, but use it only if confronted with a charging bear. Spray toward the bear, aiming slightly downward.



DEFENDERS OF WILDLIFE  
1130 17th Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20036-4604  
202.682.9400  
[www.defenders.org](http://www.defenders.org)