Washington Department of
FISH & WILDLIFE

Living with Wildlife: Be Bear Aware



Photo by WDFW.

Black bears are common throughout most of Washington, including suburban areas and in greenbelts near cities and towns. They are omnivores and eat just about anything they can get their paws on — primarily plants like berries and nuts, but also insects, small mammals, fish, birds, and animal carcasses.

As Washington's human population grows, people and black bears have greater chances of encountering each other. It's up to all of us to help keep wildlife wild!

Did you know?
Black bears are usually black but can also be brown, cinnamon, blond, or a combination of colors.



Photo by WDFW.

More information is available at **wdfw.wa.gov/blackbears** or **bearwise.org**.

Prevention is key: secure potential attractants

When preparing for hibernation in the fall and after waking in the spring, bears look for high-calorie, easy-to-find food sources. All black bears hibernate in some form. However, in areas with constant and predictable food sources provided by humans, denning may be delayed or intermittent during winter.

If black bears get used to finding high-calorie food in an area, they will keep coming back. The best way to encourage them to move along and focus on natural food sources is by removing potential attractants.

You can help keep black bears wild by securing common backyard attractants:

- Keep your garbage and recycling locked up until trash day.
- Take down seed and liquid bird feeders, and pick fruit trees.
- Clean your barbecue grill after each use and store it in a secure area.
- Feed pets inside if possible, or only put out a single serving and remove food and bowls when they're done eating.
- Store all pet, livestock, and human food where bears can't smell or see it. **Never** intentionally feed bears or allow them to be comfortable around people — this can cause problems for both bears and people. (Not to mention, it's against the law!)



Photo by WideAwake Photography.

Your trash is a bear's treasure

Unsecured garbage is one of the top causes of conflicts between black bears and humans. Feeding or negligently attracting black bears is also illegal under state law (RCW 77.15.790) and can lead to fines of up to $1,025.

Ask your local waste management company if bear-resistant containers (BRCs) are available or if individually purchased BRCs are compatible with the company's equipment. Secure your garbage and recycling cans, such as in a shed or garage, and put them out the morning of pickup — not the night before. To help reduce odors, freeze meat and fish waste before disposing of it.

If you're leaving several days before pickup, haul your garbage to a dump or ask a neighbor if they can put the can out for you later. If staying in a vacation rental, take your garbage with you when you leave and encourage the property owner to share this guidance with future tenants.

Attract birds, not bears

Seed and liquid bird feeders are common black bear attractants. You can still attract birds to your yard with native trees, flowers, and bushes, which provide food and shelter. Nesting boxes and water sources such as bird baths, fountains, and pools can also attract birds. Avoid feeding or planting fruits, nuts, and berries, as these may attract black bears.



Photo by Corey Van Bronckhorst.

Protect your bees, chickens, and livestock

One way to protect beehives, chicken coops, and small livestock is by putting up an electric fence. To keep black bears out, electric fences should have at least five electrified wires; the lowest should be about 8-12 inches above ground, and the top wire should be at least 36-42 inches high. Contact your regional WDFW office for help with specific situations.



Photo by Douglas Boze.

What if you encounter a black bear?

Black bears are generally non-aggressive and non-confrontational, and attacks are rare. As with all wildlife, it's important to keep a safe distance from bears and give them plenty of space.

Here are a few tips for what to do if you encounter a black bear:

- If the bear appears unaware of you, stay calm and move away quietly when it's not looking. If it sees you, back away slowly.
- If the bear approaches, stand tall, wave your hands above your head, and talk to the bear in a low voice.
- If the bear continues approaching, clap, stomp, and yell. Use bear spray, aiming for the bear's face (and slightly downward), when the bear is within 20-30 feet of you. Don't run. This encourages bears to chase, and black bears can run up to 35 mph. They're also great climbers, so climbing a tree is not recommended.
- In the unlikely event of a black bear attack, fight back with anything available to you and use your bear spray.

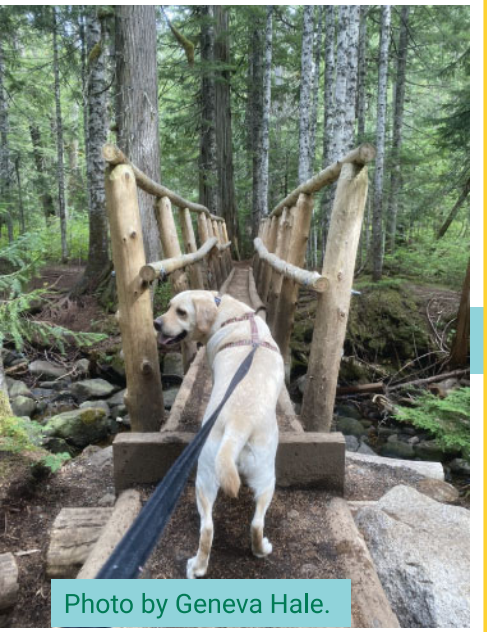


Photo by Geneva Hale.

Dogs and bears don't mix

Black bears will defend themselves, their cubs, and their food if needed. They can harm dogs or people who get between them and a dog. Your off-leash canine companion could also lead a bear back to you.

Keep your dog on a leash, and don't allow it to chase, lunge at, or approach bears. Supervise your pets when they go outside. If your dog comes in contact with a bear, use bear spray instead of getting between the bear and your pet.

Request this information in an alternative format or language at wdfw.wa.gov/accessibility/requests-accommodation, 833-885-1012, TTY (711), or CivilRightsTeam@dfw.wa.gov.