

# Dept. of Natural Resources: Take steps now to avoid potential conflicts with black bears

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**MADISON, Wis.** – The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) encourages residents and visitors to take precautions to avoid potential conflicts with black bears.

Black bears are most common in the northern half of the state; however, populations have been slowly expanding southward for the past few decades. They are naturally cautious animals that normally avoid contact with people, but conflicts do still occur, most often when food or attractants are involved. Bears can associate human activities with food when food sources are readily available, which can lead to further conflict.

“The majority of bear complaints we receive involve some type of attractant,” said Brad Koele, DNR Wildlife Damage Specialist. “Grills, bird feeders and unsecured trash containers or garbage cans are the most common attractants. It is important to make sure these attractants are inaccessible to bear at all times of the year, but it’s especially important in the spring when natural food sources are limited. Taking proactive steps now will decrease the likelihood of conflict.”

If a bear finds food, such as bird feed or garbage near homes and cabins, it will often return until the food source is unavailable. Even then, bears will periodically check sites where food was once available, so it may take several days to weeks after a food source has been removed for a bear to discontinue visiting food sites entirely. The best approach is prevention through reducing bear attractants or access to them.

Follow these steps to avoid attracting black bears:

- Completely remove bird feeders, even during daytime hours – bears are active during the day and may cause problems even if the feeders are out only during that time
- Clean areas where bird feeders were located so that accumulated deposits of spilled seed are removed
- Reduce garbage odors by rinsing food cans before putting them in covered recycling containers or garbage cans
- Keep meat scraps in the freezer until garbage day, and if possible, keep garbage cans in a closed building until the morning of pick-up
- Be sure to lock commercial dumpsters
- Keep pet food inside or inaccessible to bears even during daytime hours
- Keep barbeque grills and picnic tables clean

These are several of the ways people can reduce negative human-bear conflicts around their homes. More information can be found in the DNR's [Living With Black Bears In Wisconsin pamphlet](#). It's a great resource for learning more about co-existing with bears in Wisconsin.

### **When Conflict Does Arise**

Conflicts will still occur to some degree, so the DNR recommends knowing what to do if you encounter a bear. If a bear is near your home or cabin, from a safe location or a safe distance from the bear, try to scare the bear away by making loud noises or throwing objects in the direction of the bear. When scaring a bear away, make sure it has a clear escape route. Never corner a bear, and do not turn and run away.

If you encounter a bear while in the woods, stay calm and do not approach the bear. Wave your arms and make noise to scare it away. Back away slowly and seek a safe location where you can wait for the bear to leave. Never approach a bear, and for your safety, do not attempt to break up a fight between your pet and a bear.

If unable to resolve a conflict with a bear, contact the USDA Wildlife Services toll-free line at 1-800-433-0663 for properties in southern Wisconsin and 1-800-228-1368 for properties in northern Wisconsin.

For more information regarding bears and safety, visit the DNR's [Black Bear Management webpage](#).