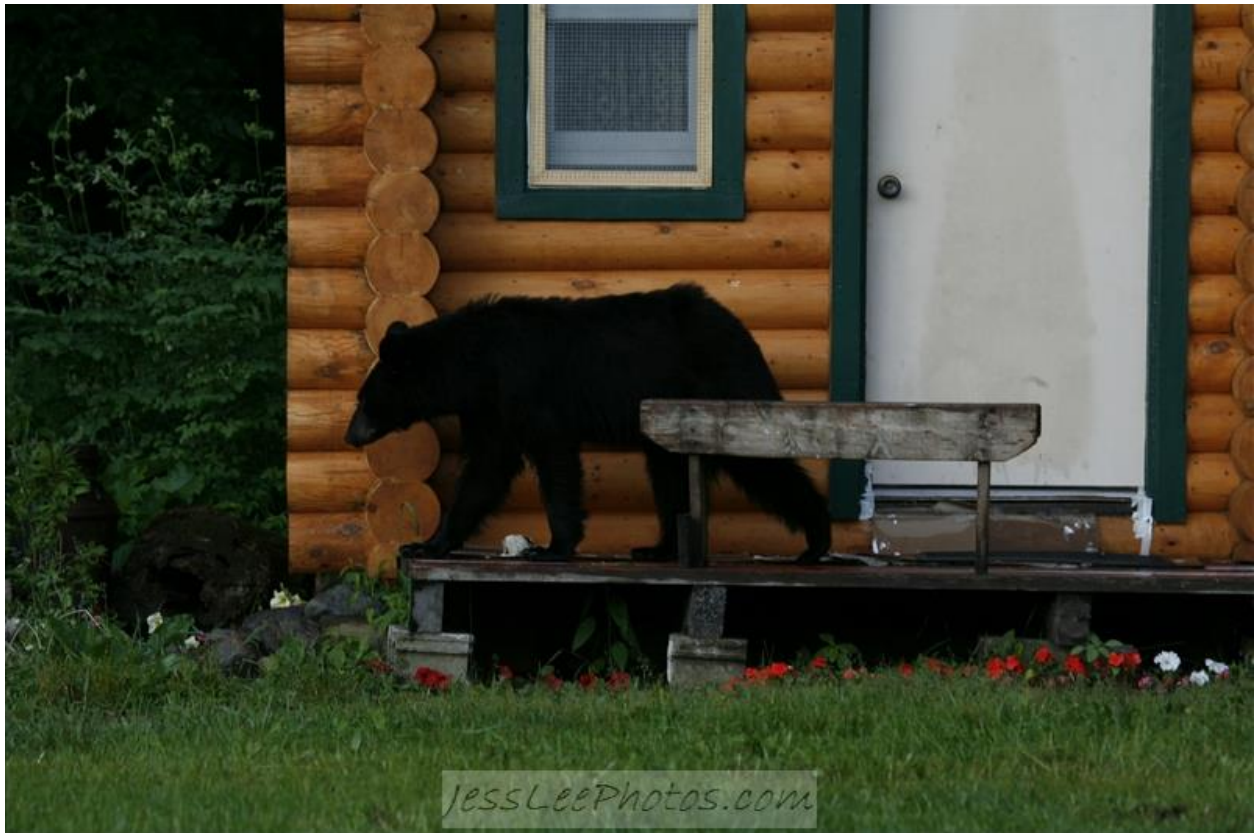


## Close Encounters of the Ursine Kind: The Home Front

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### Why Prevent Bear Encounters at Home in Bear Country?

- Bears are extremely intelligent, making them good at solving problems, such as finding clever ways to invade your home for food or a comfy den site. Property damage can be substantial.
- Bears, with their phenomenal sense of smell and persistent hunger, follow their noses to find food around and in homes, campgrounds, cars and communities, often losing their natural wariness of humans and making confrontations more likely.
- Unlike humans, bears want to be fat. They must gain 30 to 40% of their springtime body weight by fall hibernation. In a year without natural foods, they will search out anything that smells edible, sometimes consuming toxic household items stored by humans.
- Bears have excellent memories and will return to a food source, becoming dangerous aggressors when intent on getting a meal. After all, a bear that discovers the delight of a Big Mac, fries or ice cream has a hard time going back to acorns.
- Bears can generalize, recognizing that a “big white box” of goodies in one family’s kitchen or garage is the place to investigate in the house next door.
- In Colorado a bear who twice becomes a nuisance is given a death sentence. We humans can prevent those unnecessary deaths by adopting responsible behavior.

## Bear-proofing Your Outdoor Spaces

The following recommendations will work best if your neighbors *also* bear-proof their properties.

- Keep household trash in a secure indoor location or a locked, fenced enclosure until the morning of neighborhood garage collection; a study conducted in Payson, AZ showed that simply putting out trash on the day of pickup reduced the chances of a bear visit from 70% to 2%.
- For a video of bears enjoying an outdoor home visit of eating dog food and trashing trash cans go to [www.youtube.com/watch?v=qjFSSnFA13Y](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qjFSSnFA13Y).



- If you must store garbage outdoors, purchase a bear-proof container, making certain it is ***certified for black bears***, not grizzlies. Certified bear-resistant trash containers have passed a formal testing procedure developed by the Living with Wildlife Foundation and the U.S. Forest Service among other agencies. Black bear-resistant containers are sold by [www.bearsaver.com](http://www.bearsaver.com), by [www.bearicuda.com/](http://www.bearicuda.com/), and by other manufacturers.
  - For a product-testing video of a foiled grizzly attack on a grizzly-proof container, see <http://www.lwwf.org/index.php/products-testing>
  - *Black bears can easily pry open bins designed for grizzlies, as their short curved claws make them more nimble than the grizzlies with their longer, straighter claws.*
- Keep trash containers clean by periodically deodorizing them with a spray of bleach or ammonia.
  - *The smell of ammonia and ammonia-based cleaners like Pine Sol irritate a bear's sensitive mucous membranes, so using those liquids liberally on objects may help.*
  - *Bears have noses 100 times more sensitive than that of humans and can smell food 5 miles away and scent humans one mile away. They can also detect molecules of food on clothing that has been carried in a backpack with food.*
- Never leave pet food outdoors. That is an open invitation to a hungry bruin. A 25-pound bag of dog food has over 42,000 calories, a good reward for invading human space.

- Stick to grasses and leaves in mulch piles, as melon rinds and other smelly, calorie-rich leftovers are attractants. A sprinkle of lime will help mask odors and speed up the composting process.
  - *But if you have no secure place to dispose of smelly food scraps, consider bagging them and storing them in your freezer until the next trash pickup.*
- Suspend bird feeders with seeds or nectar 10 feet off the ground and 10 feet from anything a bear can climb OR put seeds out only in winter months when bears are in hibernation. Attract summer birds with birdbaths, fountains or flowers. Put up nest boxes. If you wish to feed birds in bear season, bring feeders indoors at night. And never let seeds or hulls accumulate under a feeder. Consider offering only hulled sunflower seeds.
  - *Some studies show that 80% of human-bear conflicts can be traced back to the bear's first encounter with a bird feeder. Feeders are easy for bears to recognize, and seed has lots of calories – 1740 in a pound of sunflower seeds. A 32-oz. hummingbird feeder has 774 energizing calories. Once bears discover feeders, they will visit every nearby home looking for more.*



- *Bears can be real gymnasts when trying to reach a suspended feeder. They understand pulleys too. Do not underestimate their creativity or athletic ability!*





- *And if the bear is stymied by your feeder arrangement, it is still likely to investigate the rest of your property, honing in on a weak spot, such as space under your deck which could make a snug den come winter.*



- Pick fruit on your property before it ripens fully, and clean up fallen fruit. Alternatively, place a portable electric fence around individual trees or berry bushes or install a permanent electric fence around an orchard or large garden plot. The following websites will help you with choices that include solar-powered systems: [www.lwwf.org](http://www.lwwf.org), [www.kencove.com](http://www.kencove.com), [www.electric-fence.com](http://www.electric-fence.com),



Joshua Leonard photograph

- If possible, locate your vegetable garden away from your home and away from obvious bear habitat. And know that deer repellents, bone meal, and fish fertilizer smell like food to a hungry bear.
  - *Spring flower shoots are also tasty, as are nutritious, digestible mature flower heads.*



- Clean outdoor grills with each use. An ammonia spray is again a good deterrent.
- If you park outside, make sure there is nothing with odor stored in your vehicle – food, air freshener, lip balm, lotions -- and clean up any crumbs, spills or wrappers. Bears have learned that humans never go anywhere without provisions. And keep your vehicle locked. Bears can easily shred a car's interior and have even dened up in rarely used or abandoned vehicles.



- Do **not** wander around in the dark near your home if you have not done all of the above! A surprised bear is a dangerous bear.

### **Bear-proofing Your Home**

- Keep garage doors closed at all times and put birdseed and pet food in sealed containers inside the garage. But a hungry and determined bear can break down a flimsy garage door and crush a typical metal storage shed like we humans crush a soda can. Bears are muscular animals.



- At night and when you are absent, tightly close and lock all windows that would allow access by a bear. If you must leave them open, install sturdy bars.



*With their curved short claws, bears can grasp even the smallest protruding edge of an unlocked casement window, pry it open and/or rip it from its hinges.*

- Remove tree limbs that overhang upper decks, as bears, being adept climbers, can access your second floor with ease. Otherwise, lock or bar those vulnerable windows.
  - *Bears have been seen dropping onto rooftops from trees and dangling from the eaves in trying to open a second-story window. They are persistent and inventive animals.*





Ashley Hockenberry photograph

- Put on talk radio, not music, when you leave your home as the human voice startles most bears. That works for henhouses and barns too. And if you don't have a dog, install "Rex Plus, the Electronic Watchdog," which detects motion and barks realistically. [www.amazon.com/Safety-Technology-International-ED-50-Electronic/dp/B002XITC5G](http://www.amazon.com/Safety-Technology-International-ED-50-Electronic/dp/B002XITC5G)  
<http://sti-usa.com/category/AlarmsChimes/BarkingDogAlarm/index.htm>

At night or when absent lock all exterior doors and know that bears can easily operate sliding doors and paddle-shaped door handles/levers. Round knobs are more challenging than levers. They just might keep your kitchen from looking like this:



- And as bears are curious creatures, they will peer through windows and glass doors to see if there are any temptations inside. Closing blinds or curtains when you are absent could prevent an attempted raid on your own "big white box."



- Two-way pet doors can allow access to a cub or adult, depending upon the door's size. Winter den entrances in Colorado range between only 9 and 14 inches high. A special electronic pet collar that activates a door is an option.



- Bears are even known to invade homes in daylight when the occupants are there. Odors of any kind – scented candles or soaps -- will attract a bear to an open window. Be vigilant and consider installing bells on doors or some other warning system.
- In rural areas with many bears, it may be necessary to install an Unwelcome Mat of plywood with upward projecting nails, screws, or carpet tack strips by doorways and windows.





- Another choice is an Electric Unwelcome Mat that will lightly shock people and bears but will not injure. If you have a troublesome bear and live in Colorado, Colorado Parks and Wildlife will even place a temporary electric mat at your home until you can install one of your own. But if you are part of a subdivision, check to see if those deterrents are permitted.
- And install warning signs for human visitors. Good advice may be found at [www.bearsmart.com/live/bear-deterrents/](http://www.bearsmart.com/live/bear-deterrents/) and at [bearsmartdurango.org/unwelcome-mats/](http://bearsmartdurango.org/unwelcome-mats/).



- *Motion-sensor lights, sirens, and water sprinklers may temporarily deter a bear, but if there is no negative reinforcement, the bear will learn to ignore them.*

## **Encountering a Bear Near or Inside Your Home**

- Establish dominance! You want the bear to know that it is unwelcome in ***your*** den.
- Bears are smart. They can learn from negative experiences. Aversive conditioning works.
- Make loud noises if a bear approaches your home by clapping hands, yelling, banging on metal pots, or blowing an air horn or loud whistle. Look directly at it. Make eye contact. Bears understand that and will not even challenge another bear if it appears to have the upper hand. Bear do not like conflict, and bear combat is rare.
- Spray the bear in its face with a hard stream of water from a hose, or drop a 5-gallon bucket of water on it from a 2<sup>nd</sup> floor window. A super-soaker filled with a very mild water-vinegar mix is effective when aimed at a bear's face. But do not use ammonia: It can blind a bear.

- Yell while throwing rocks, bricks, anything. Easiest is to have a bucket of baseball or golf ball rejects handy, as they are easier to throw than a rock. After Little League season or adult softball season, ask about acquiring used balls. Or check with sports consignment or thrift stores.
- Bear spray is effective within 30 feet, but make sure the wind is blowing away from you! And bear pepper spray is **not** the same as personal defense spray. It must be E.P.A. registered to be effective against bears. The following sprays are registered: Counter Assault Bear Deterrent Spray ([www.counterassault.com](http://www.counterassault.com)) and SABRE Frontiersman Bear Deterrent Spray ([www.sabrered.com/bear-spray](http://www.sabrered.com/bear-spray)).
- Do your best to scare a bear away from your home, but do NOT pursue it into woods where it should feel safe. That establishes boundaries for both you and the bear.
  - If a bear enters your home when you are there, prop open doors and windows and make sure it has an escape route. Only then make noises, yell, or throw things. Sound dominant. If that approach is not appealing, confine yourself to a safe area once the escape route is in place. Never, ever approach the bear, as it will view your movement as aggressive. If the animal will not leave, call CPW; if it presents an immediate threat, call 911.
    - *Unless you surprise or approach a bear, your chances of an attack are very low. Only two people have been killed in Colorado in the last century, one near Grand Lake in 1971 and one near Cotopaxi in 1973.*

## Resources for the Homeowner

Masterson, Linda. "Living with Bears: A Practical Guide to Bear Country," Pixy Jack Press, 2006. (<http://livingwithbears.com> )

Living with Wildlife Foundation (<http://livingwithbears.com> )

Colorado Parks and Wildlife ([www.wildlife.state.co.us/bears](http://www.wildlife.state.co.us/bears))

Get Bear Smart Society ([www.bearsmart.com](http://www.bearsmart.com))

Bear Smart Durango (<http://bearsmartdurango.org> )

Lake Tahoe Bear League ([www.savebears.org](http://www.savebears.org) )