

COLORADO DIVISION OF WILDLIFE

Deterrents Can Teach Bears to Stay Away

Help Keep Bears Wild



© ESTES PARK TRAIL GAZETTE/ (HAZELTONS)

Bears are always on the lookout for food sources. Like most animals, bears are interested in finding the most calories they can for the least amount of work. Every calorie a bear can save is a calorie that can help it fatten up and live through the winter. Bears that have been rewarded with an easy meal for poking their nose into someone's bird feeder, garbage can or garage will often investigate any similar "food sources" in their home range. Sending bears on their way empty-pawed helps protect your home and property, and teaches the bear a lesson that could save its life.

Deterrents can be useful in areas where bears have already learned that where there are people, there is usually easy-to-get-at food. The purpose of a deterrent is to make your home less attractive and persuade an exploring bear to move on.

The best deterrent of all is to make sure there's nothing at your home or on your property to attract bears in the first place, so be sure to review our *Living with Bears* brochure and fact sheets for bearproofing tips.

Electronic Deterrents

Motion activated lights, noise makers and alarms

A bear may be sufficiently startled by flashing lights, noise makers, alarms and sprinkler systems to leave the area the first time, but if nothing else happens to reinforce the experience,

studies show, like most wildlife, bears will learn to ignore these type of devices, quickly figuring out they're all bark, no bite. Still, the commotion can alert you to the presence of an intruder of some sort.

If you're reviewing options, products that randomly produce a different noise each time they're activated or have lights that flash in different patterns may be more effective than something with a single repetitive sound or a light that simply comes on for several minutes.

Radios

Leaving a radio tuned to a talk show can make it sound like someone is home and may persuade bears to leave the area. It's the human voice that does the trick; music doesn't seem to have any effect. If you'll be gone for an extended period of time, you can put a radio on a timer. Some people have found this to be an effective technique in chicken coops as well.

Scent Deterrents

A bear's nose is 100 times more sensitive than a human's. If you find bleach or ammonia fumes unpleasant, you can imagine what they smell like to a bear. Bleach or ammonia-based cleaners are good for trash cans and other areas where strong scents could attract bears. Some people have had some success with covered buckets or other containers filled with bleach or ammonia, with holes punched in the lids to let the scent out, placed outside bear-accessible doors and windows. Bears also dislike the strong scent of pine-based cleaners, but avoid using anything with a fresh, lemony or fruity smell. And never mix bleach and ammonia; the combination produces fumes that can be deadly to both people and bears.

Warning: Ammonia Can Blind Bears

Some sources recommend ammonia-filled balloons covered with honey or peanut butter as a deterrent; theoretically when the bear tries to bite the balloon, it gets a face full of ammonia instead of a treat. But an eyeful of ammonia or bleach is more than a deterrent – it can seriously injure or blind a bear.

Bear Spray is Not A Deterrent

Bear pepper spray is meant for defensive use in a close encounter with a bear that has escalated into a charge. (See *Hiking and Camping in Bear Country* for more information on bear spray and bear encounters) Unfortunately spraying bear spray on things you'd like bears to avoid doesn't work – when the spray dries, the pepper residue left behind mellows out and creates odors that can actually attract bears.

Barrier Deterrents

Ordinary chain link, wood, or vinyl fencing won't keep out bears. Bears are great climbers and can easily scoot up and over fencing if there's something on the other side they really want. Black bears are also good diggers and can tunnel underneath fencing as well.

Enclosures



© CLAIRE SECHRIST/DOW

If you can't store your garbage inside a sturdy locked building, a heavy duty chain link fenced enclosure with a chain-link "roof," concrete pad bottom, and locking (not latching) gate can help keep out your average bears – but smells will still attract them, as well as other wildlife, so you will need to be extra-vigilant and make sure there are no other food sources around.



© TOWN OF SNOWMASS VILLAGE

In areas with high bear activity, it's better to secure trash inside the house, in a sturdy locked garage, or specially constructed outbuilding with concrete or cinder block construction with heavy duty wood or steel doors and roof. Sides need to be flush with the ground, with no more than a 2" gap at the bottom of the doors. Ventilation holes should be kept to a minimum and covered with heavy gauge steel mesh.

Electric Fencing

A properly installed and maintained electric fence is an excellent bear deterrent, and proven to be effective at turning back bears. Electric fencing can be used to protect gardens, fruit trees, livestock pens, and even campers, trailers and vacation homes. It's important to check local regulations to see if electric fencing is permitted in your area, and to read and follow all of the manufacturer's installation requirements and directions. You'll find detailed information on how to install an electric fence on our Web site.

Unwelcome Mats



© JIM TIFFIN

SOME PEOPLE USE ROT RESISTANT CEDAR FENCING TO CONSTRUCT UNWELCOME MATS.

Unwelcome mats are typically made of sheets of sturdy plywood that have been carefully studded with small nails pointing up that can be placed in front of bear-accessible doors and windows. They've been shown to be very effective at deterring bears, and are sometimes used to protect summer and vacation homes when owners are away. Unwelcome mats can also be used on a temporary basis if there is a bear active in your neighborhood. It's very important that unwelcome mats be made, installed and used properly to avoid injuring bears or human or canine visitors.

For more detailed information on creating you own mats, see the fact sheet *Unwelcome Mats*.

Please Do Your Part to Keep Bears Wild

Visit www.wildlife.state.co.us/bears for more information or call your local Division of Wildlife Office.