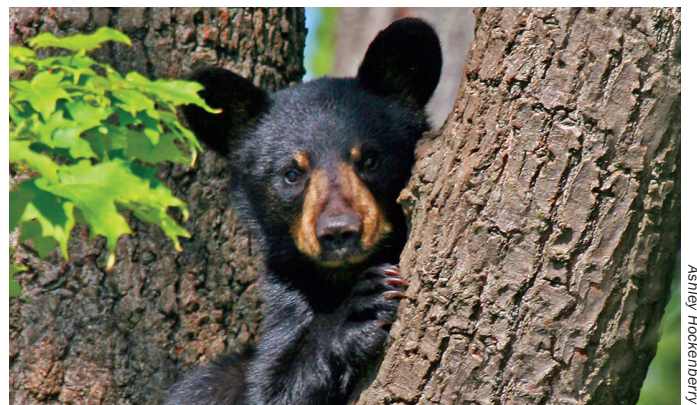


# A guide to living in **bear country**



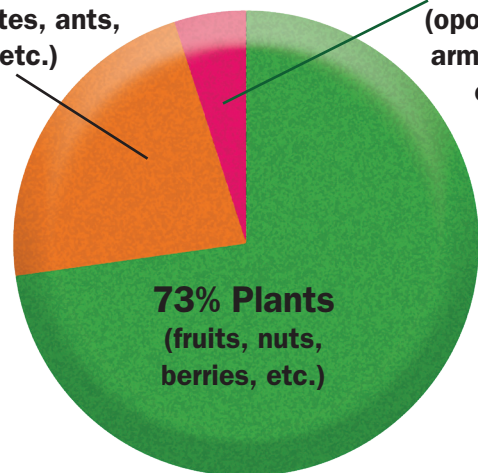
## The bear facts

- Black bears are the only species of bear in Florida.
- Biologists estimate there are over 4,000 bears today, compared to 300 in the 1970s.
- Bears can pick up scents from over a mile away: that's seven times better than a bloodhound.
- Adult bears typically weigh between 150 to 400 pounds, with males often twice the size of females.
- Females have their first litter at 2 to 3 years old, with one to three cubs born every other year.
- Breeding occurs from June to August, with cubs born around February 1.
- On average, a female's home range is over 15 square miles and a male's home range is over 60 square miles.

## A bear's diet

**22% Insects**  
(termites, ants,  
bees, etc.)

**5% Meat**  
(opossums,  
armadillos,  
carrion,  
etc.)



Florida Fish and Wildlife  
Conservation Commission

[MyFWC.com/Bear](http://MyFWC.com/Bear)

**It is illegal to put out food or garbage that attracts bears and causes conflicts.**

**Anything that attracts dogs, cats or raccoons also attracts bears!**

## **Bear behavior and you**

Black bears are generally shy and not aggressive. When seen near homes bears are often just passing through. When frightened, bears typically run away or climb a tree. If a bear is in a tree, it is either feeding or trying to escape danger. Keep people and pets away, and the bear will leave on its own, usually after dark.

When a bear stands on its hind legs, it is trying to get a better view or scent. Black bears may huff, snap their jaws, swat the ground or “bluff charge” when cornered, threatened or defending food or young. If this happens, stop, stand your ground and then slowly back away.

Remember, bears are large, powerful, wild animals that can be unpredictable and become dangerous. Bears who receive food from people may lose their natural fear of them and are more likely to damage property or become a public safety risk. NEVER feed or attract bears.

**Carry bear spray and learn how to use it properly, paying attention to wind direction, distance to bear (20-40 ft.) and your escape route. Make sure to buy spray designed for use on bears.**



**Learn all about Florida's bears at [MyFWC.com/Bear](http://MyFWC.com/Bear) and how to be BearWise® at [BearWise.org](http://BearWise.org)**



## **BearWise® tips:**

- Never approach a bear, keep your distance. If a bear changes its behavior because you're there, you are too close.
- If you encounter a bear at close range, stand with arms raised, back up slowly and speak to the bear in a calm, assertive voice.
- Do not turn your back, play dead or run from a black bear.
- Make sure you are in a secure area, such as a car or building, and the bear has a clear escape route, then scare the bear away with loud noises, like yelling, blowing a whistle, or using an air or car horn.
- Install a motion-activated device, such as flood lights, a water sprinkler or audio alarm, to temporarily scare the bear off so you can remove or secure attractants.
- Report any bear threatening the safety of people, pets or livestock, or causing property damage to the FWC (see back cover).
- Walk dogs on a non-retractable leash and be aware of your surroundings. Dogs can trigger defensive behaviors from bears.
- Alert neighbors of bear activity in your community and share information on how to avoid conflicts with bears.

**Warning! It is illegal to take, possess, injure, shoot, collect or sell black bears under Florida state law unless authorized by an FWC-issued permit. If you are found guilty, you can face fines and/or jail time.**

## Avoid attracting bears

Bears do not linger if they do not find food. Properly storing or securing garbage and other attractants is a proven method of preventing conflicts. However, it takes a community-wide effort to keep bears wild and out of neighborhoods.

- Use electric fencing to protect gardens, garbage, compost piles, beehives, fruit trees and livestock.



John Bailey

- Use an electric “unwelcome” mat to keep bears away from a specific area, such as under a window, door or fence.



- Keep garage doors closed when not in use.
- Feed pets indoors or bring food and bowls in at night.
- Store pet and livestock feed in bear-resistant containers or inside a secure area.
- Remove or modify bird and wildlife feeders and ensure the ground is free of all feed debris.
- Properly harvest ripe nuts, fruits, and vegetables and remove rotten fruits and vegetables.
- Keep outdoor refrigerators and freezers in a secure location or lock them up.
- Clean meat smokers and barbecue grills with a degreasing detergent.

## A screened-in porch will not keep bears out!



Eglin AFB

## Securing garbage

- Store garbage in a secure area, such as a sturdy shed or garage, until the morning of pickup, or
- Build a small shed to store trash cans. If the shed is curbside, call your waste service provider to ensure they will still service trash cans, or
- If you have a sturdy trash can, you can modify it with hardware to be bear-resistant. Call your waste service provider to ensure they will service a modified trash can, or
- Request a commercially manufactured bear-resistant trash can from your waste service provider. If they do not provide these cans, you can special order one from a hardware store, but ensure your waste service provider will service it.



**Funds from the Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida's "Conserve Wildlife" license plate help conserve bears and reduce human-bear conflicts. Buy one today at your local tax collector's office or online at [wildlifeflorida.org/cwt](http://wildlifeflorida.org/cwt).**



MIKE FOX

## How FWC responds to conflicts

The FWC addresses human-bear conflicts in a variety of ways, including providing technical assistance over the phone, conducting an in-person visit with the resident, using deterrents (such as electric fences), attempting to scare the bear away, or, in rare cases, attempting to trap the bear.

While most conflicts can be avoided by securing attractants, FWC assesses each situation to decide on the most appropriate response. The earlier the FWC is notified, the more options are available. The longer a conflict situation continues, the more likely the bear will develop behaviors that present a risk to public safety, such as entering a dwelling. Once this happens, it is too late to try to change the bear's behavior and it must be humanely killed.

Encourage your school system to use the *Florida Black Bear Curriculum Guide*, designed for grades 3 to 8 and correlated to state education standards. Found at [floridabear.org](http://floridabear.org).



## Where bears live in Florida



If you are experiencing bear conflicts, please contact the nearest FWC regional office.

<b>North Central</b>	<b>Lake City</b>	<b>(386) 758-0525</b>
<b>Northeast</b>	<b>Ocala</b>	<b>(352) 732-1225</b>
<b>Northwest</b>	<b>Panama City</b>	<b>(850) 265-3676</b>
<b>South</b>	<b>West Palm Beach</b>	<b>(561) 625-5122</b>
<b>Southwest</b>	<b>Lakeland</b>	<b>(863) 648-3200</b>

In an emergency or if you suspect illegal activity, call the Wildlife Alert Hotline at **888-404-FWCC (3922)**.



*The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission does not allow discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age or disability. If you have been discriminated against in any program, activity or facility of this agency which received Federal financial assistance, you should contact/write to: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Office of Human Resources, 620 South Meridian Street, Tallahassee, FL 32399-1600; Telephone 850-488-6411 or contact/write to: Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Civil Rights, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1849 C Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20240.*



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