

Bears! Oh My!

Bears live across the United States and Canada, and although they generally avoid humans, encounters can still occur. Understanding bear behavior and knowing how to react can help prevent dangerous situations.

Interesting Bear Facts

- There are 8 species of bears worldwide.
- Unlike many mammals, bears see in color.
- Bears are highly intelligent and can use tools. Some have even been observed rolling rocks into traps to safely access bait!
- During hibernation, bears do not defecate; their bodies convert waste into protein, a process that scientists still don't fully understand.
- Their front claws are longer than their back claws, with some species (like grizzlies) having claws up to 5 inches long.

For more fascinating facts, check out these [79 Interesting Bear Facts](#).

How to Avoid Attracting Bears

Most bear encounters in populated areas happen because bears are searching for food. To reduce the risk:

- Secure garbage in bear-proof containers.
- Remove bird feeders (especially at night) if bears are active in your area.
- Store pet food indoors and clean grills after use.
- Talk to your neighbors; community efforts help keep bears away.

Protect yourself when hiking or camping:

- Travel in groups. Bears are more likely to avoid larger numbers.
- Carry bear spray and know how to use it (aim low, create a cloud between you and the bear).
- Make noise (talk, clap) in dense brush to avoid surprising a bear.
- Store food properly when camping. Use bear-proof containers or hang food 10 feet or more off the ground.
- Avoid surprising bears. Stick to open trails and be alert near streams or thick brush.



If you encounter a bear inside a building:

- Provide an escape route. Leave doors open and back away slowly.
- Never corner a bear. Trapping it can trigger aggression.

What to Do If You Encounter a Bear

Follow these [National Park Service guidelines](#) to stay safe:

1. Stay Calm and Identify Yourself

- Speak in a calm, firm voice and slowly wave your arms. This helps the bear recognize you as human, not prey.
- A standing bear is usually curious, not aggressive.

2. Do Not Run or Climb a Tree

- Bears can sprint up to 40 mph, faster than any human.
- Climbing a tree won't help. Black bears and grizzlies can climb.
- Move sideways slowly, keeping the bear in view.

3. Make Yourself Look Bigger

- Stand tall, raise your arms, and step onto higher ground if possible.

If a Bear Attacks

Most charges are bluff attacks where the bear will stop or veer away. Stay calm and stand your ground.

Brown/Grizzly Bear Attack:

- Play dead. Lie flat on your stomach, cover your neck with your hands, and spread your legs to make it harder for them to flip you.
- Stay still until the bear leaves.

Black Bear Attack:

- Fight back aggressively. Use bear spray, rocks, or any available weapon. Aim for the face and muzzle.

If Attacked in Your Tent:

- Do NOT play dead. This is likely a predatory attack by a hungry bear. Fight back with everything you have.

