

# Backcountry Camping in Black Bear Country

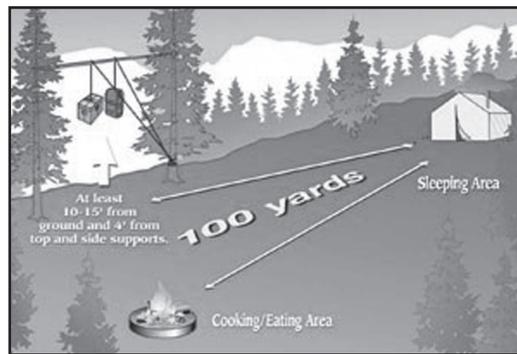


Whether you're camping in a reserved campsite in a park or forest, or an undeveloped site off the beaten path, if you're west of I-25, you're camping in black bear country. Nobody wants to lose a week's worth of food to a foraging bear or wake up in the middle of the night to the sounds of a bear exploring their camp. Choosing a smart campsite, properly locating your cooking, eating and food storage areas, keeping a clean camp and storing your food and other items with odors in a bear-responsible way can help you avoid attracting bears.



© ESTES PARK TRAIL GAZETTE/BEAR IN ROCKS (HAZELTONS)

Avoid camping near natural food sources, like bushes or trees that are bearing fruit, berries or acorns, or animal or fish carcasses.



If possible, experts recommend setting up your cooking, eating and a food and supplies storage area at least 100 yards from your sleeping area.

If there's not enough room to follow the recommendations, make sure smoke from your campfire won't blow into your tent, and be sure to store your food well away from your sleeping area.

## Know Before You Go

Familiarize yourself with all local regulations before you head out. Plan your travel to arrive before dark, in plenty of time to locate a good site with trees suitable for hanging your food bags and set up your camp properly.

## Choosing a Campsite

Look for any signs of recent bear activity at your chosen or assigned site. This might include trash scattered about, fresh tracks or scat, or recently clawed trees. If there are signs a bear has visited the campsite recently, consider finding another site if one is available.

Set up your camp well away from any natural travel corridors, like the edge of the forest, obvious wildlife trails, or stream banks and lake shores — all areas bears like to use. Camping next to a stream also makes it hard for bears to hear you — and vice versa.

## In Your Tent

Designate your tent and sleeping area as a food- and beverage-free zone. Don't bring anything with an odor into your tent, including food, beverages, snacks, emergency chocolate bars, toothpaste, soap, deodorant, scented toiletries or citronella-based bug repellent. Don't sleep in the clothes you cooked in or store them in your tent. Hang them with your food.

Keep a flashlight handy for night-time forays, and take a good look around before you venture into the bushes. Avoid hiking at night; wildlife often uses man-made trails as well as wildlife trails after dark. Most bear experts recommend keeping a canister of bear spray in your tent. Properly used, bear spray has been proven to be more reliable and effective than a firearm for deterring bears.

Many bear experts recommend sleeping away from your tent wall. Bears often explore with their noses and have been known to swat or nip at something they can't identify to figure out if it's worth exploring further.

## Bear Smart Camping Tips

- Store food and anything with an odor, including toiletries and the clothes you cook in, in bear-resistant containers or suspended at least 10 feet above ground, at least four feet away from the tree trunk, and at least four feet down from the top of the tree or any large branches.
- Leave highly odorous foods like tuna, sausage and bacon at home. Cooking intensifies and disperses food odors, so be extra careful to clean up and store food properly if you're cooking.
- Citronella products have a strong scent that may attract bears. Don't burn citronella candles in camp.
- Pack out all garbage and trash. Never bury garbage; bears will find it and dig it up, and you'll be teaching them campsites are a good place to look for food. Don't burn garbage or leftovers; a campfire is not hot enough to completely incinerate the remains, and the smell is very attractive to bears.
- Clean fish well away from your campsite and dispose of skin, entrails, etc. by leaving out in the open, well away from shorelines of lakes and streams, trails and campsites. Hang bait with your food and be sure to wash up thoroughly afterwards. Some fishermen pack disposable plastic gloves to keep their hands odor-free.
- Don't leave food, beverages or packs unattended even for a few minutes. It's an open invitation for everything from ground squirrels, gray jays, ravens and even bears to stop by and make off with the loot.

## Car Camping

If you're driving your car or RV to a remote, undeveloped site in the forest, please read our Camping and Hiking in Bear country brochure. Food and other items with odors should still be stored in bear-resistant containers or hung properly. Keep windows and doors closed and locked at all times. Don't leave anything that a bear might associate with food in view, such as coolers or grocery bags, even if there is no food in them. A bear may recognize them as objects that usually have food and be willing to break into your vehicle in hopes of getting a reward.



ATTRACTING BEARS TO YOUR VEHICLE CAN RESULT IN THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS IN DAMAGE. ROLL UP YOUR WINDOWS, LOCK YOUR DOORS AND DON'T LEAVE FOOD OR ATTRACTANTS IN YOUR CAR.

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## Hunting in Bear Country

The fall hunting season is also the time when bears are active up to 20 hours a day, foraging around the clock trying to gain enough weight to survive the coming winter. Bears are very focused on finding food and may not be as alert to your presence or as willing to abandon a good food source as they might be earlier in the year. The quiet, stealthy behavior necessary for you to surprise your quarry also increases the chance you could surprise a foraging bear, so if you are not making



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NUMEROUS STUDIES SHOW BEAR SPRAY IS MORE EFFECTIVE THAN A FIRE ARM FOR DETERRING BEARS.

noise, stop often to look around and be extra alert when traveling along streams or through natural food sources like oak brush.

Even though you're carrying a weapon, experts recommend you have bear spray readily available. Wearing gloves and an apron when cleaning game will help reduce the odors you get on your clothing. Separate the carcass from the entrails and remove the carcass as soon as possible.

If you're not immediately packing out, hang your carcass at least 10 feet from the ground and four feet out from anything bears could climb and as far away from your campsite or sleeping area as you are comfortable. Try to hang it where you can see it from a distance.

## Grizzly Bears

There are no known grizzly bears in Colorado. If you will be camping somewhere in grizzly bear country, be sure to get information on grizzly bear behavior. Grizzly bears respond to humans and human encounters differently from black bears. Many areas with grizzly bears also have mandated food storage requirements you'll want to review.

Visit [www.wildlife.state.co.us/bears](http://www.wildlife.state.co.us/bears) for more information or call your local Colorado Parks and Wildlife Office.