

Safety in Black Bear Country



Thousands of black bears live in Utah's forests and mountains, often in the same places we camp, hike and build our houses. This poses a safety concern for both humans and bears. If a bear obtains food from a home or campsite—even once—it may become aggressive in future attempts. This almost guarantees the bear will have to be destroyed. Fortunately, there are steps you can take to protect both you and the bear.

Camp and hike responsibly

Sloppy campers and hikers don't just endanger themselves, but also future visitors. Bears have amazing memories; they will return to a site repeatedly if they ate there at some point in the past. When in bear country, you should:

Maintain a bear-safe campsite

- Store food, drinks and scented items securely (in your vehicle, a bear-safe container or a tree—never in your tent)
- Dispose of trash in bear-proof dumpsters, if available
- Wipe down picnic tables
- Burn food off stoves or grills
- Pitch tents away from trails in the backcountry
- Always sleep inside your tent
- Never approach or feed a bear
- Report bear sightings to your campground host

Take precautions while hiking

- Stay alert at dawn and dusk, when bears are more active
- Go with a group, if possible
- Make noise as you travel through dense cover
- Stay away from animal carcasses
- Store food, trash and scented items (such as sunscreen) in airtight plastic bags
- Keep kids in the center of the group

Protect your home and property

If a bear enters your yard, give it an obvious escape route—do not corner it. Black bears can quickly inflict thousands of dollars in property damage.

You can reduce or eliminate visits from bears if you:

Dispose of trash carefully

- Store trash in a secure location or bear-safe container
- Put your trash out for pick-up in the morning, not the previous night
- Clean your trash container regularly

Use deterrents

- Put up electric fencing
- Place bear unwelcome mats (wood planks with nails or screws protruding) in front of doors or windows
- Install motion-activated lights or noisemakers
- Get one or more dogs
- Turn on garden hoses or sprinklers
- Spray the bear with bear spray

If you encounter a bear

- Stand your ground. Never back up, lie down or play dead. Stay calm and give the bear a chance to leave. Prepare to use your bear spray or another deterrent.
- Don't run away or climb a tree. Black bears are excellent climbers and can run up to 35 mph—you cannot outclimb or outrun them.
- Know bear behavior. If a bear stands up, grunts, moans or makes other sounds, it's not being aggressive. These are the ways a bear gets a better look or smell and expresses its interest.

If a bear attacks

- Use bear spray. Then leave the area. Studies have shown bear spray to be 92 percent successful in deterring bear attacks.
- Shoot to kill. If you use a firearm, never fire a warning shot—aim for the center of the bear and keep firing until it is dead. Notify the Division of Wildlife Resources immediately.
- Always fight back. And never give up! People have successfully defended themselves with almost anything: rocks, sticks, backpacks, water bottles and even their hands and feet.

Report a nuisance bear

If you see a bear in a residential area or you encounter an aggressive bear, please contact the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources immediately. We have offices in:

- Cedar City, (435) 865-6100
- Ogden, (801) 476-2740
- Price, (435) 613-3700
- Salt Lake City, (801) 538-4700
- Springville, (801) 491-5678
- Vernal, (435) 781-9453

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