

The Safety Site

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Recreational Safety takes Responsibility & Control

Camping in Bear Territory

Know Your Bears

Can you tell the difference between a black bear and a grizzly bear? Check out the main differences so you know what you're dealing with.

Grizzly Bear

- Color: Range in color from black to light blonde. Mostly medium to dark brown in color. The long hair usually have a lighter tip, hence they look "grizzled".
- Size: Average 350-500 lbs. Larger grizzlies can reach 800 pounds.
- Height: Stand around 3.3 ft - 6.5 ft at shoulder.
- Shape: Look for a distinct shoulder hump.
- Face: There's a depression between the eyes and end of nose, and they have short, round ears.
- Claws: Very long (2-4 in)
- Prints: Minimal arc in toes, toe imprints are close together, and the claw leave long, visible marks.

Black Bear

- Color: Range in color from black to light blonde. Many black bears have a lighter patch on their chest, and reddish-colored bears are common in the west.
- Size: Average 110-300 lbs. Large males can reach 400 lbs and be larger than a female grizzly.
- Height: A little smaller, from 2.5-3 ft at shoulder. Around 5 ft standing.
- Shape: No hump like the grizzly.
- Face: A straight line runs between the forehead and end of nose. They have larger, pointed ears.
- Claws: Shorter (around 1.5 in)
- Prints: Look for a large toe arc, toe imprints will be farther apart, and the claws usually don't leave an impression.

Campground and Picnic Area Precautions

- Never cook or store food in or near your tent.
- Hang food and other items with strong odors (ie, toothpaste, bug repellent, soap, etc.) out of reach of bears. Hang items at least 10 ft above the ground and. If no trees are available, store your food in airtight or bear-proof containers.

- Change your clothing before you go to sleep; don't wear what you cooked in to go to bed and be sure to store smelly clothing along with your food/smelly items.
- Keep the area clean. Be sure to wash dishes, dispose of garbage, and wipe down tables.
- Burn garbage completely in a hot fire and pack trash out - don't bury it.

Backcountry and Trail Precautions

- Don't surprise bears. If you're hiking, make your presence known. Make noise by talking loudly, singing, or wearing a bell.
- If you can, travel with a group. Groups are noisier and easier for bears to detect.
- Keep in mind that bears tend to be more active at dawn and dusk so plan your hikes accordingly.
- Stay on marked trails and obey the regulations of the area you're hiking/camping in.
- If you're hiking in bear country, keep an eye out for tracks, scat, digs, and trees that bears have rubbed.
- Leave your dog at home!

If You Encounter a Bear...

- Remain calm and avoid sudden movements.
- Give the bear plenty of room, allowing it to continue its activities undisturbed. If it changes its behavior, you're too close so back away.
- If you see a bear but the bear doesn't see you, detour quickly and quietly.
- If a bear spots you, try to get its attention while it is still farther away. You want it to know you're human so talk in a normal voice and waive your arms.
- Remember that a standing bear is not always a sign of aggression. Many times, bears will stand to get a better view.
- Throw something onto the ground (like your camera) if the bear pursues you, as it may be distracted by this and allow you to escape.
- Never feed or throw food to a bear.

If a Bear Charges...

- Remember that many bears charge as a bluff. They may run, then veer off or stop abruptly. Stand your ground until the bear stops, then slowly back away.
- Never run from a bear! They will chase you and bears can run faster than 30 mph.
- Don't run towards or climb a tree. Black bears and some grizzlies can climb trees, and many bear will be provoked to chase you if they see you climbing.
- If you have pepper spray, be sure that you have trained with it before using it during an attack.

If a Grizzly Bear Attacks...

- Play dead!

- Lie face down on the ground with your hands around the back of your neck.
- Stay silent and try not to move.
- Keep your legs spread apart and if you can, leave your pack on to protect your back.
- Once the bear backs off, stay quiet and still for as long as you can. Bears will often watch from a distance and come back if they see movement.

If a Black Bear Attacks

- Be loud, wave your arms, and stand your ground.
- Fight back! Be aggressive and use any object you have.
- Only if you are sure the bear attacking is a mother protecting her cubs, play dead.
- Keep your legs spread apart and if you can, leave your pack on to protect your back.
- If you have pepper spray, use it. Begin spraying when its within 40 feet so it runs into the fog. Aim for the face.

As with all trips, be sure to research where you are going and what wildlife is in the area. Preparation and knowledge is the key to ensuring a safe trip. Keep an eye out for bear warnings and always talk to a ranger if you have questions or concerns

This article was courtesy of Lauren Himiak on about.com.