



Bears are part of  
our natural heritage.

Black bears are an important part of our ecosystem. They are highly intelligent, powerful and potentially dangerous. Usually, bears avoid and fear humans. They are opportunistic omnivores. In other words, they will eat just about anything people will eat. They will also eat food waste created by humans. Here are some facts to help you better understand how black bears behave, both in the wild and around human habitation.



In an immediate emergency, call your local police or 911. To report bear problems call:

**1 866 514-2327**

(1 866 514-BEAR)

TTY 705 945-7641

For more information, visit our website:

[ontario.ca/bearwise](http://ontario.ca/bearwise)

**A quick look at black bears:**

- Black bears live primarily in forested areas and throughout most of Ontario
- They are large, powerful animals. Adult males can weigh between 120-270 kilograms (250-600 pounds). Adult females can weigh between 45-180 kilograms (100-400 pounds)
- Female bears have their first cubs when they are between five and seven years old. Mother bears do not produce cubs every year, they stay with their cubs throughout their year of birth and until the following spring

**Hibernation:**

- Black bears hibernate for about six months. In this time, they do not eat or drink
- Most black bears in northern Ontario move into their winter dens by mid-October. In central Ontario, bears usually enter their dens by early November
- In most years black bears in northern Ontario emerge from their dens between mid-April and early May. Bears in central Ontario leave their dens from mid to late April

**Food:**

- Bears feed from mid-April to late fall
- From the time bears come out of hibernation until berry crops are available, bears live off their stored fat and the limited energy provided by fresh spring greens
- Black bears eat a variety of foods. They get most of their food energy by feeding on summer berry crops such as blueberries, strawberries and raspberries, as well as hazel nuts, mountain ash, acorns and beech nuts in the fall
- In late summer and early fall some bears actively feed for 20 hours a day, ingesting as much as 20,000 calories
- Black bears are selective feeders and prefer foods that are accessible, high in energy and easy to digest. They eat both plants and animals, but the bulk of their diet is plant material
- Bears need to fatten up so they can survive winter hibernation and in the case of females, produce and feed young. Bears are instinctively driven to feed. Bears typically double their body weight during the summer and fall

**Human-bear conflict:**

- If natural foods are not readily available, bears will look for other food sources – primarily your garbage
- Once bears learn where to find and get a non-natural food source, they will return again and again

To learn more about bear encounters, see our Fact Sheets "What to do if you encounter a bear" and "Be safe in bear country".

There's more ... see over!





## Bears travel far for food.

Bears are highly intelligent. They easily learn where food sources can be found and use their keen sense of smell to seek them out. Bears will travel more than 100 kilometres to a known food source like a berry patch or a stand of beech trees and they will return to these same locations year after year. Bears are always looking for new food sources, including your garbage or the contents of your cooler. Once they determine that food can be found at your house or campsite, they will revisit again and again.

**BEARS CAN  
BE DANGEROUS**



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### Some things to remember about Ontario's black bears:

- When food crops fail, the potential for human-bear conflicts increases as bears search for alternate food sources
- Bears lose their natural fear of humans through repeated exposure to people in areas where food is intentionally or unintentionally provided. In such cases, conflict with humans is inevitable. Bears may even become destructive or dangerous
- Such bears are often destroyed because they have become "nuisances" or are perceived as a threat to human safety. They also have a greater risk of getting injured or killed in collisions with vehicles. That is why you should never intentionally feed bears or place food to attract other wildlife (including birds) to your yard for viewing
- Bears quickly learn to associate human residences and campsites with a readily available food source. In fact, most bear problems occur as the result of improperly stored household garbage
- Bears are also attracted to pet food that is left outdoors, bird feeders, grease and food residue left on barbecue grills, composters, fruit trees, sweet corn and grain fields
- Garbage dumps provide a concentration of readily available food that often attracts bears. Bears that feed on garbage in landfills risk physical injury. They also become conditioned to eating garbage at landfills

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