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Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Technical Information Bulletin

Make Your Wildlife Feeder Bear Resistant

Black bears are opportunistic foragers that are readily attracted to food sources provided by humans. The increasing use of wildlife feeders for deer and other animals has brought about increased use of these sites by bears. Bears have learned that feeders are an easy source of food and may destroy feeders while trying to extract the contents. These situations are not only unfortunate for the persons operating the feeder; they are harmful for bears, too. Once bears begin to associate food with people, they start to lose their natural fear of humans. Such conditioned bears tend to become nuisance animals, making human/bear conflicts inevitable. The best method for preventing bears from approaching human use areas is to remove all food sources. If such removal is not possible, the next best option is to make food unattractive or inaccessible to bears.

Two methods of dealing with bear depredations of wildlife feeders are recommended. The first method is to use food plots instead of feeders. Food plots are cheaper, always present, replicate more natural food sources, and provide better nutrition for wildlife than corn and other grains. If you still wish to directly feed corn or other grains, install automatic feeders suspended from a metal post (see diagram below). Many types of timed feeding devices are available, ranging from homemade mechanisms to those sold at feed stores or hunting supply outlets. Timing devices cost between \$30 - \$250 and can be found at local hunting supply stores or by searching the Internet for the key words "deer feeders." Whatever type is used, the most critical factor in "bear-resistant" the feeder is its placement.

Bears are powerful, agile, and resourceful, necessitating that any feeder be placed out of their reach. The bottom of hanging feeders should be a minimum of 8 feet above the ground and feeder tops should be sealed tightly to keep grain dry and unfermented. The metal post should be buried to a depth of 4 feet and set in concrete. A square hole should be dug to increase resistance and prevent a bear from pushing the post over. The cost of materials for hanging a wildlife feeder totals less than \$100.00. This price includes: a 20' piece of 3" schedule 40 steel pipe, 3 80-lb. bags of Quickcrete, and a boat winch.

Where bears are a problem, feeders and food plots should be located away from swamps and creeks. These areas are the preferred habitats of bears, and feed sites close to

them invite visits from hungry bears. Also, locate the feed site away from any heavy cover, the further the better. Bears often follow heavy cover while traveling. Remember, bears generally are timid. Encountering a bear should not be cause for fear, but you should exercise caution. If a bear approaches, make loud noises and waive your arms. A loud, authoritative "Get out of here, bear!" usually drives them away.

Hopefully, one of these tips will solve your problem with bear depredations. For further information, or if you encounter a bear that does not display a natural fear of humans, call the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission at the number listed in your local phone directory.

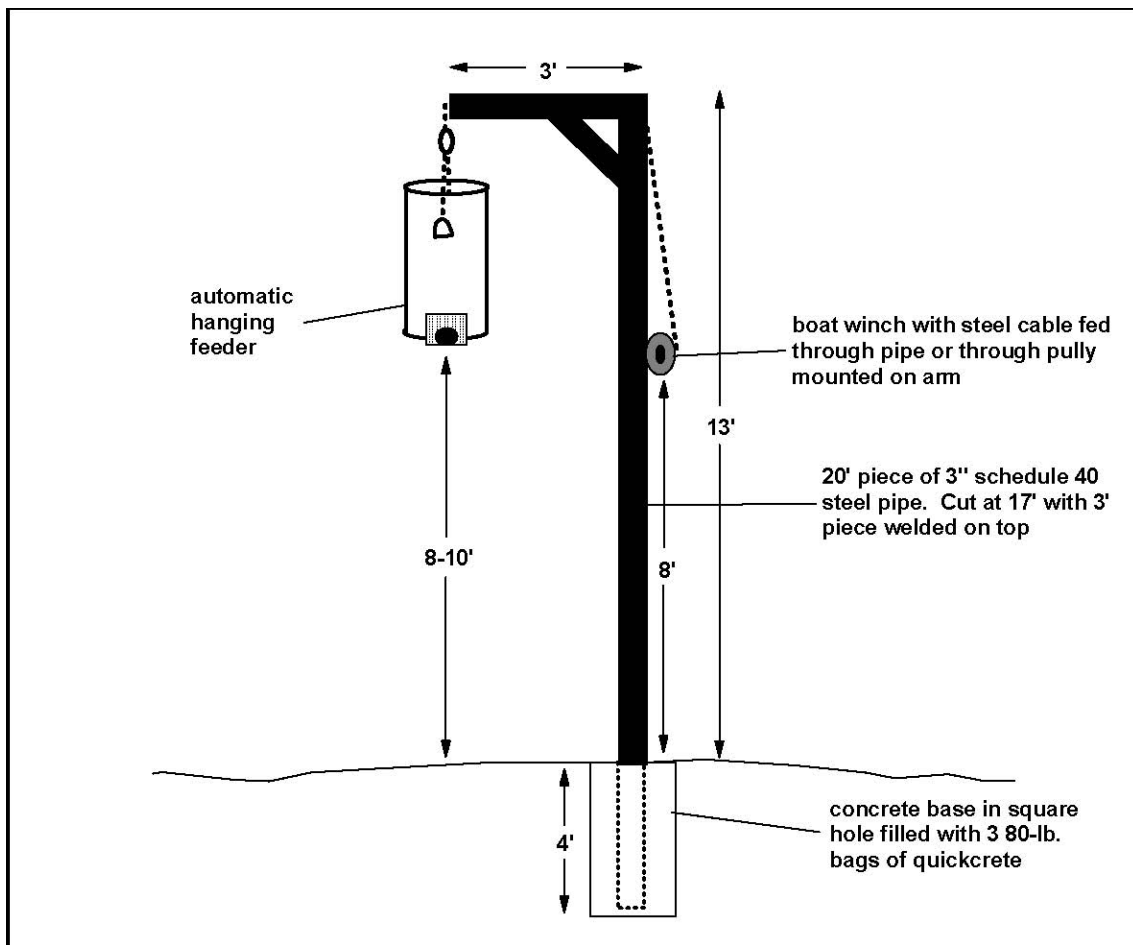


Figure 1. Diagram of how to hang a wildlife feeder out of the reach of bears.