Secure your garbage

- Store garbage in a secure area, such as a sturdy shed or garage, until the morning of pickup, or
- Build a small shed to store trash cans. Be sure there are no gaps along the shed’s edges and use screws. If the shed is curbside, call your waste service provider to ensure it will still service your trash cans, or
- Modify your regular trash can to make it bear-resistant by adding hardware. To be successful, the lid must not be flexible and the can must not collapse when you stand on its side. Call your waste service provider to ensure it will service a modified trash can, or
- Request a commercially manufactured bear-resistant trash can from your waste service provider. If they do not provide these cans, you can special order one from a hardware store, but ensure your waste service provider will service it.

How FWC responds to conflicts

The FWC addresses human-bear conflicts in a variety of ways, including providing technical assistance over the phone, conducting an in-person visit with the resident, using deterrents (such as an electric fence), attempting to scare the bear away, or, in rare cases, attempting to trap the bear.

While most conflicts can be avoided by securing attractants, biologists assess each situation on a case-by-case basis and use FWC policies and guidelines to help decide on the most appropriate response.

The earlier the FWC is notified, the more response options are available.

The longer a conflict situation continues, the more likely the bear will develop behaviors that present a risk to public safety, such as entering a dwelling, harming a leashed dog or injuring a person.

Once this happens, it is too late to try to change the bear’s behavior and it must be humanely killed.

If you are experiencing bear conflicts, please contact the nearest FWC regional office. The sooner the FWC knows about bear activity, the more options are available to prevent a bear from becoming a public safety risk.

North Central  Lake City  (386) 758-0525
Northeast  Ocala  (352) 732-1225
Northwest  Panama City  (850) 265-3676
South  West Palm Beach  (561) 625-5122
Southwest  Lakeland  (863) 648-3200

In an emergency or if you suspect illegal activity, call the Wildlife Alert Hotline at 888-404-FWCC (3922).

Follow us on:

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
MyFWC.com/Bear

Warning! It is illegal to take, possess, injure, shoot, collect or sell black bears under Florida state law unless authorized by an FWC-issued permit. If you are found guilty, you could face fines and/or jail time.

Funds from Florida’s “Conserve Wildlife” license plate help conserve bears and reduce human-bear conflicts. Buy one today through your local tax collector’s office or online at BuyAPlate.com.
The bear facts
- Black bears are the only species of bear in Florida.
- Biologists estimate approximately 4,000 black bears roam Florida today, compared to as few as 300 bears in the 1970s.
- Bears can pick up scents from over a mile away; that’s seven times better than a bloodhound and the best of any land mammal.
- Adult bears typically weigh between 150 to 400 pounds, with males often twice the size of females.
- Females have their first litter around 3 years of age, with one to three cubs born every other year.
- Breeding occurs from June to August, with cubs born around February 1.
- On average, females range over 15 square miles and males range over 60 square miles.

A bear’s diet
15% Insects (termites, ants, bees, etc.)
5% Meat (opossums, armadillos, carrion, etc.)
80% Plants (fruits, nuts, berries, etc.)

Bear behavior and you
Black bears are shy and generally not aggressive. When seen near homes or workplaces, bears are often just passing through. When frightened, bears typically run away or climb a tree. If a bear is in a tree, it is either feeding or trying to escape danger. Keep people and pets away, and the bear will leave on its own, usually after dark.

BearWise tips:
- Never approach a bear. Keep as much distance between you and the bear as possible.
- If a bear changes its behavior because you’re there, you are too close.
- If you encounter a bear at close range, stand with arms raised, back up slowly and speak to the bear in a calm, assertive voice.
- Do not turn your back, play dead or run from a black bear.
- Make sure you are in a secure area, such as a car or building, and the bear has a clear escape route. The n scare the bear away with loud noises, like yelling, blowing a whistle, or using an air or car horn.
- Install a motion-activated device, such as flood lights, a water sprinkler or audio alarm, to scare a bear away from a location when you are not present.
- Report any bear threatening the safety of people, pets or livestock, or causing property damage, to the FWC (see back cover).
- Walk dogs on a non-retractable leash and be aware of your surroundings. Dogs can trigger defensive behaviors from bears.

Avoid attracting bears
Bears do not hang around people if they do not find food. Properly storing or securing garbage and other attractants is a proven method of preventing bear conflicts. However, it takes a community-wide effort to keep bears wild and away from neighborhoods.
- Use electric fencing to protect gardens, garbage, compost piles, beehives, fruit trees and livestock.
- Keep garage doors closed when not in use.
- Feed pets indoors or bring food dishes (even empty ones) inside at night.
- Store pet and livestock feed in bear-resistant containers or inside a secure area.
- Remove or modify bird and wildlife feeders and ensure the ground is free of all feed debris.
- Properly harvest ripe nuts, fruits, and vegetables and remove rotten fruits and vegetables.
- Create an “unwelcome” mat by driving finishing nails, heads up, into a sheet of anchored plywood to keep bears away from a specific area, such as under a window, door or fence.
- Keep outdoor refrigerators and freezers in a secure location or lock up with super-adhesive anchors, like Marine Locks™.
- Clean meat smokers and barbeque grills with a degreasing detergent and store in a secure area. Dispose of food remnants/grease after each use.
- A screened-in porch will not keep bears out!

Learn all about Florida’s bears and being BearWise at MyFWC.com/BearWise.