



United States Department of Agriculture  
Forest Service

**PACIFIC SOUTHWEST REGION**

*Restoring, Enhancing and Sustaining Forests in California, Hawaii and the Pacific Islands*

**Sierra National Forest**

# Care For Bears

## Bass Lake Ranger District

**BEARS IN THE WILD**

Wild bears are part of the natural forest environment and, at a safe distance, are a thrill to observe. Some wild bears encountering careless human visitors become reliant on humans as an easy source for food. Once a bear finds this easy food, it remembers and will return. Encounters with persistent bears will often spoil visits with loss of food and destruction of equipment or vehicles.

The cycle of human-caused dependant, destructive bears can be broken if forest visitors follow rules for proper food storage at camps and in vehicles. Using bear resistant canisters and being knowledgeable about bears will help new bears not learn this deadly behavior.

**SAVE A BEAR– AND YOUR VACATION**

Save the life of a bear and a vacation by properly storing food. Each year bears are killed in the Sierra as a direct result of improper food storage by forest visitors. Do not train bears to get food from humans.

Bears have a keen sense of smell and rather poor eyesight. They smell food first and then investigate. Bears can recognize bottles, cans, ice chests and grocery bags as food sources. Bears are powerful animals and have torn apart vehicles to get at items they believe are food.

**WHAT TO DO**

For a successful vacation and to eliminate possible damage to your vehicle or camping equipment take time to prepare for a safe vacation keep a clean vehicle and camp, and, properly store food .

**BE PREPARED**

Educate yourself about your destination and think ahead about food and containers. Bears can be found at any elevation in forest areas. Contact forest stations for current information.

Re-package food items to eliminate extra packaging. Bring extra sealable plastic bags of all sizes to store foods, ice chests, trash, and scented items in camp and in vehicles.

**KEEP A CLEAN CAMP**

Keeping a clean camp is important. Bears can smell a camp littered with food wrappings or scraps, dirty plates, dishes, cups, cans, bottles, and utensils. Place all trash in sealed plastic bags and place away from camper, tents and vehicles. Hang the trash from a tall tree limb out of easy reach of a bear.

**NO FOOD IN VEHICLES**

Bears have damaged vehicles for as little as a stick of gum or an empty soda can, so a clean vehicle is important. Thoroughly search your vehicle (don't forget the glove compartment) and remove all food, trash, and anything that may smell or look like food.

Bears can smell food even when it is stored in the trunk. Food containers, drinks, garbage, food-soiled car seats and scented items such as soap, sunscreen, and toothpaste, even when empty, have an enticing smell. Remove them from your vehicle and store them securely in a plastic trash bag.

If food must be stored in a vehicle, put food in sealed plastic bags in the trunk. If the vehicle has no trunk, place items on the floor and cover completely.



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## HANG UP FOOD

Bears are very clever and some are able to figure out food storage methods. Hanging food over a high tree branch can still be a way to protect food and yourself.

There are several ways to hang your food. Throw a long rope over a tall tree branch. Using heavy plastic bags, tightly sealed, secure the bag of items to the rope. Hoist the bag to within five feet of the limb and secure the rope to the tree trunk. Another way is the counterbalance method.

## BACKPACKING TIPS

Most bear damage for backpackers occurs at trailheads and areas where vehicles are left unattended with food, food containers, wrappers and other scented items carelessly left in the vehicle. Clean out your vehicle before parking and properly store food sealed in plastic bags and out of site of the bears.

## BEAR-RESISTANT FOOD CONTAINERS

Bear-resistant food containers do not hold a lot of food, but they can hold items that you can not live without. If you camp frequently in bear areas, the investment in these containers might be appropriate.

## SAFETY FIRST

**Do not ever approach a bear.** If you should encounter a bear, make noise – yell, clap hands, bang pots, use a whistle or air horn. Stand together with other people and NEVER surround a bear. If you see bear cubs, a mother bear may act aggressively to protect them, so use extreme caution.

These actions, when started as soon as you see the bear, have been successful in scaring bears away. If a bear does take food or items from camp or vehicle, **never** chase a bear to get items back! Wash hands and face and wear clean clothes for sleeping. Bears can sniff out food and other fragrant odors. Never have food in a tent or have food in clothing when sleeping.

Should a bear encounter take place, report all incidents to a visitor contact station or Forest Service employee.

Do your part to save wild bears from becoming accustomed to connecting humans with food. Save the life of a bear. Care for the bears - it is good for you and it is good for the bears.

For additional information please contact:

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