

Fall is power-eating season for bears

December 3, 2023



Bears are currently in the midst of their annual fall eat-a-thon, known as hyperphagia, as they prepare for winter.

This intense feeding period begins in late summer when berries and fruits ripen and peaks when fruits such as pears, apples, and plums become available. During this time, bears spend up to 20 hours a day foraging for food as they prepare for their winter's rest.

It is crucial for people to take precautions to secure attractants and prevent bears from getting into trash and other tempting food sources.

“The Coast Range has an abundance of berries and natural foods for all kinds of wildlife, but bears won’t turn down an opportunity for an easy meal, even if it’s garbage,” said Skyler Gerrity, ODFW assistant wildlife biologist. Human-provided foods such as bird seed, pet food and food scraps in the garbage or compost can give bears a day’s worth of calories in a short amount of time. However, wild animals have

specialized natural diets, and food provided by humans lacks essential nutrients. In fact, consuming human-provided food can lead to health issues and even death for bears and other wildlife.

And bears pose a serious safety risk to people once used to eating human-provided food, and know where to go for refills.

Bears possess remarkable memories and a keen sense of smell when it comes to food. They not only remember where they found food before, including in trash cans, but female bears also pass this knowledge down to their young. Feeding bears, whether intentional or accidental, can have long-lasting negative effects on multiple generations of bears.

The good news is that most conflict between humans and bears is preventable.

Bears don't want to be around humans, but the prospect of an easy meal is often too good to resist.

Removing things that attract them to the area is the most important thing one can do to protect people and ensure bears stay healthy and wild.

- Never feed or approach bears. Feeding bears, whether meaning to or not, will cause them to associate humans with food. It is also against the law in Oregon (ORS 496.730).
- Secure food, garbage and recycling. Ensure trash, compost bins and dumpsters are secure by using locking or screw-on lids, metal bars over dumpsters, or fully enclosed trash storage. Take trash out immediately before pick-up, not the night before.
- Remove bird feeders. Birds have plenty of naturally-available food sources.
- Feed pets inside and store food indoors. Pet food attracts bears and other wildlife, putting your pets and wildlife at risk. Store livestock/chicken feed in a secure place.
- Clean and store grills after each use.
- Alert neighbors to unusual bear activity (continued sightings during daylight hours, lack of wariness around humans or pets, etc.). Share these tips with your neighbors!

These simple yet effective steps will go a long way to avoid conflict and keep bears and humans safe.

Contact your local district ODFW office if you need assistance with a bear-human conflict or observe unusual or aggressive behavior from a bear. Report human safety concerns to Oregon State Police.

Learn more: <https://myodfw.com/articles/help-keep-bears-wild>