

Bear Safety



Bears usually stand on their hind legs out of curiosity—not as a sign of aggression.



The American black bear and the brown bear, which is commonly referred to as a grizzly, are two of the three species of bears found in North America. Black bears are found in parts of northern Mexico, 38 states, most of Canada, and Alaska. Brown (grizzly) bears are found in Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, and Washington, as well as Alaska and western Canada.

Generally, if a bear knows of your presence, it will attempt to avoid you. Most bear conflicts occur because humans attempt to feed a bear or have, intentionally or not, approached a bear.

PLEASE!! Don't Feed the Bears!

Never feed a bear! Feeding bears familiarizes them with human foods and attracts them to garbage. Garbage may contain plastics, aluminum foil, or other debris which, if ingested, may cause malnourishment, illness, or even death. Feeding bears also causes them to become habituated to (i.e., to lose their fear of) humans. Habituated bears tend to become “problem” bears, as they approach humans too closely or cause damage in their quest for food. Problem bears will oftentimes need to be “removed” (a euphemism for being destroyed), which has resulted in the saying: A fed bear is a dead bear.

Handling Food in Bear Country

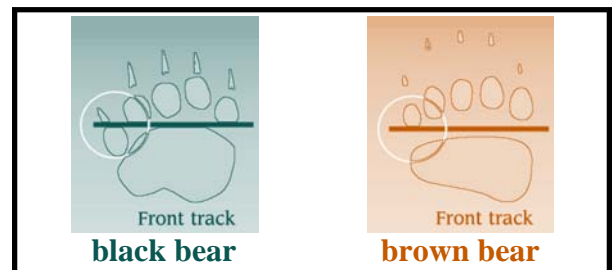
It is especially important that you properly handle and store food, garbage, and personal items. Cook, eat, and clean up at least 100 yards from your sleeping area. Store food, garbage, and odorous personal items (toothpaste, deodorant, soap, and lotions) in bear-resistant containers (not ice chests!), in a hard-sided vehicle, or at least 10 feet from the ground and 4 feet from side supports. Remove clothing after cooking and store it with your food. Wash your hands after cooking, eating, or handling fish/game. Strain food particles from your dishwasher and place with garbage. Do not take food, drinks, or odorous personal items into your sleeping area.

How to Avoid Bear Encounters

When hiking, hunting, camping, or fishing, there are several ways to avoid bear encounters. Make your presence known by talking, clapping, or singing. Carry food and/or garbage in odor-proof containers. Watch for signs of bear activity: tracks, scat, torn-up logs or stumps, and overturned rocks. Stay on established trails. Keep children within sight at all times and leave your pets at home or keep them on a leash. Travel only in daylight and, if possible, in groups. If you see a bear in the distance, try to alter your route to avoid it.

Bear Encounters

Despite your best efforts, encounters may occur. Try to gauge the bear's intentions—is he agitated and drooling or calm and curious? Agitated, drooling bears may charge. Whether the bear appears calm or agitated, speak in a low, monotone voice and slowly back away. Never turn your back to a bear. Do not run—doing so could trigger an attack and bears can easily outrun humans. Avoid direct eye contact. If you are with a group, stay together. Pick up small children. Always let someone know where you are going and when you'll be back.



What Should You Do If...

...A Bear Approaches You

If avoidance tactics don't work and a bear approaches, do not run. Try to scare the bear by shouting, making noise, waving your arms, and throwing stones.

...A Bear Charges You

Do not run! Stand your ground if charged, as bears may bluff charge several times and then leave. Don't drop your backpack, as it may offer some protection in the event of an attack. Use bear pepper spray (this is not the same as personal defense sprays), which has been effective against charging bears without causing them long-term adverse effects.

...A Bear Attacks You in your tent

If any bear attacks you while you are in a tent, fight back with any weapons you can find: sticks, stones, boots, or your fists. Use bear pepper spray.

...A Bear Attacks You while you're hiking

If a bear attacks and you can reach your bear pepper spray, use it! Otherwise, it is important to know how to distinguish between black and brown bears, as your response to an attack will depend upon the species. Fight back with anything available against a black bear attack. Use sticks, stones, and your fists. In contrast, playing dead is your best defense against a grizzly attack: curl into a ball or lie face down, use your hands and arms to protect your neck and face, roll with the strikes, and don't move or make noise until the bear is out of the area.

Average Size

black bears

- males, 130-660 pounds
- females, 90-175 pounds
- 2.5-3 feet tall at shoulder
- Generally, black bears in Arizona and the western US are smaller.

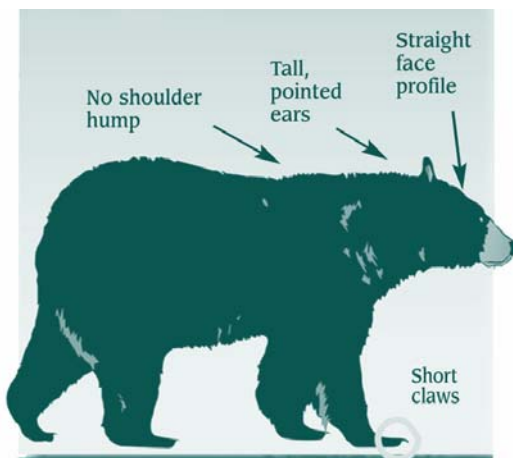
brown bears

- males, 300-860 pounds
- females, 205-455 pounds
- 3.5-4 feet tall at shoulder
- Generally, brown bears in Canada and Alaska are larger.

How to Distinguish Between a Black Bear and a Brown Bear

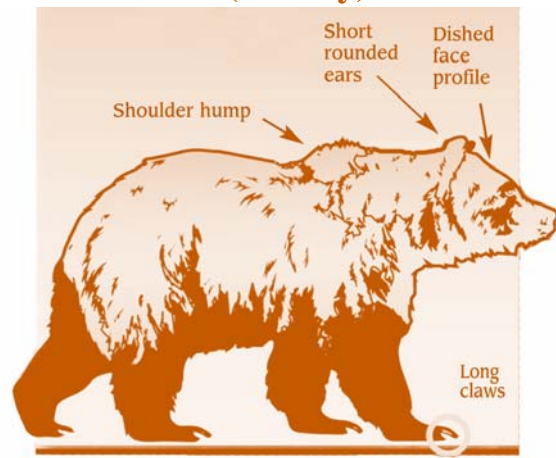
Coloring and size are not reliable indicators of species. The most common colors of black bears are black or brown with a light brown nose. However, their coloration varies widely from blonde to light brown to brown, cinnamon, rust, or black. The coloring of brown (grizzly) bears varies from blonde to light brown to black, with brown or reddish hairs interspersed. Although brown bears are, on average, larger than black bears, a large male black bear may be larger than a young female brown bear. There are, however, distinctions in appearance between black and brown bears.

American Black Bear



- Rump higher than shoulder
- Dark, curved claws, 1½ to 2 inches long
- Straight or convex face profile

Brown (Grizzly) Bear



- Distinct shoulder hump
- Light-colored, straighter claws, 2-4 inches long
- Concave (dished) face profile
- Smaller, rounded ears

Special thanks to the Center for Wildlife Information for sharing their illustrations for use in this safety insert.