

Live BearWise in CT Toolkit for Municipalities

This toolkit was compiled by CT DEEP Wildlife Division's Outreach Program. It offers the resources needed by Connecticut towns to provide information to their residents on how to "Live BearWise in CT", and contains suggested social media posts, links for specific information related to bears and bear awareness, and contact information.

Contact for Toolkit Assistance: The Outreach Program is available to assist you with social media posts for bear-related topics not covered here. We can also answer questions about this toolkit or bear outreach in general and provide some photos and graphics for use on social media and websites.

The following email address and phone number are for the toolkit ONLY -- contact the Wildlife Division's Outreach Program at deep.ctwildlife@ct.gov or call 860-424-3041 (Outreach Wildlife Biologist Kathy Herz). **(Questions about conflicts with bears should be directed to the Wildlife Division at deep.wildlife@ct.gov and 860-424-3011.)**

Links to "Live BearWise" Resources

- [Action Plan for Communities in Bear Country](#) (Find out how communities can work together to keep people and property safe and bears wild.)
- Main [Living with Black Bears](#) homepage
- [Basics of Living with Black Bears](#) (Learn about steps you can take to reduce bear encounters and potential conflicts.)
- [Report a black bear sighting](#) on the DEEP website
- View [data](#) on current bear sighting reports
- Current [map](#) of bear sighting reports
- [Frequently asked questions about black bears](#)
- [Reports, videos, storymaps, and webinars about black bears](#): Videos are available on the following topics:
 - Managing Food, Garbage, and Other Attractants
 - How to React if You Encounter a Black Bear Outdoors
 - Preventing Wildlife Conflicts with Electric Fencing
- [Deterring Bears with Electric Fencing](#) (Find resources on installing electric fencing, as well as information on free electric fence workshops.)
- [Black Bear Agricultural Damage](#): The Connecticut General Assembly enacted Public Act 23-77 during the 2023 legislative session, creating a new authorization for permits to be issued by DEEP to take wildlife (bears) that "threatens or causes damage to agricultural crops, livestock or apiaries". This webpage lays out a structured approach that individuals should take to protect their agricultural products from bears in Connecticut.

Publications

- [Black Bear Fact Sheet](#)
- BearWise Brief - [Meet the American Black Bear](#)
- [State of the Bears Report](#) (look for a new report every year)
- [Electric Fence Tips for Bears](#) (for those who have livestock, backyard chickens, apiaries, etc.)
- BearWise Fact Sheet: [Electric Fences Keep Bears Out](#)
- [Stash, Latch, Secure Your Trash](#)
- Learn how to safely [Scare the Bear](#)
- [BearWise Fact Sheets](#)

BearWise®

Connecticut is a member of [BearWise®](#), which is an education and outreach program founded, supported, and funded by state fish and wildlife agencies, including the CT DEEP Wildlife Division. BearWise has created a variety of fact sheets on how to coexist with black bears. You can also [subscribe to BearWise's email list](#) to receive helpful information on what bears are doing each month and to learn more about bears in our state and others. Find BearWise fact sheets with the DEEP logo [on the DEEP website](#). You can link to these fact sheets or print them out for distribution.

Informational Rack Cards and Door Hangers from BearWise®

The CT DEEP Wildlife Division can supply your town with rack cards on BearWise Outdoor Safety and door hangers on “What Attracts Bears”. These handouts also display the DEEP logo. Requests can be sent to deep.ctwildlife@ct.gov.



How to Obtain Bear-resistant Garbage Bins

Regular trash cans and dumpsters may look sturdy, but special reinforcement is necessary to withstand a determined bear. The upfront investment in bear-resistant products is well worth it when you consider the cost of continually replacing ruined garbage containers and spending time picking up scattered trash. Switching to bear-resistant products will help keep people and property safe and bears wild.

More and more trash haulers in Connecticut are offering bear-resistant trash containers that work with regular curbside pickup. Residents should contact providers in your town to find out if they can make the switch. They can also purchase their own bear-resistant containers, but before buying, they should check with their trash hauler to make sure the containers are compatible with their equipment.

Existing trash containers can be made more bear-resistant with materials from the local hardware store. A [list of bear-resistant products and do-it-yourself plans](#) is available from BearWise.

Suggested Social Media Posts

The following posts are suggested by season. If desired, the CT DEEP Wildlife Division can provide you with town-specific information (i.e., number of bear sightings over a given time period, number of nuisance complaints, number of home entries). Data on current bear sighting reports for your town can also be found at:

<https://ctdeep.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=924a7664caac4b9ba54512233b7d5495>.

We can also provide photographs, but you may want to use photos that are provided by your own residents. Contact deep.ctwildlife@ct.gov for town-specific information and images.

Posts for Any Time of Year

Topic: Learn what attracts bears and how you can keep them away from your home and property.

Suggested photo: bear in a yard

Black Bears are curious and will follow their powerful noses to just about anything with an odor (even bad odors). They may also investigate anything they have learned can yield a food reward, such as garbage, birdseed, pet food, chickens, and beehives. Use the Be BearWise Checklist to learn what attracts bears and how you can keep bears away from your home and property: https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/deep/wildlife/pdf_files/outreach/ct-bearwise-at-home-checklist.pdf

Topic: Report bear sightings (the number of sightings for your town are available upon request)

Suggested photo: any bear photo

So far this year, ##### bear sightings have been reported in our town (name of town). Have you seen a bear in your yard or in your travels? Report black bear sightings to the CT DEEP Wildlife Division. Sighting reports help biologists learn where bears are active in our state and how they are involved in human-caused conflicts. Fill out the form at <https://survey123.arcgis.com/share/5243a30ef25a4731941644a3677d4b72>.

Topic: Bears with ear tags

Suggested photo: bear with ear tags (available upon request)

Have you seen a black bear with ear tags? A common misconception is that an ear-tagged bear in Connecticut has been involved in a human-bear conflict, and a bear with two ear tags was caught on two different occasions because of conflicts. Every bear receives two ear tags (one in

each ear) the first time it is handled by CT DEEP Wildlife Division biologists. Most tagged bears have been caught as part of a long-term project researching the state's population. Learn what the colors and markings on bear ear tags mean at <https://portal.ct.gov/deep/wildlife/bears/frequently-asked-questions-about-black-bears#EarTags>

Topic: Black bear encounters

Suggested photo: bear in a yard or on a hiking trail.

If you encounter a bear while in your yard or hiking, make your presence known by yelling or making other loud noises. Use a bear whistle to let bears know you are nearby. Never attempt to get closer to a bear. If a bear does not retreat, slowly leave the area. If in your yard, go into your house, garage, or other structure. If the bear persistently approaches, go on the offensive—shout, wave your arms, and throw sticks or rocks. If your dog is hiking with you, it is imperative that you keep the dog on a SHORT leash and DO NOT let it roam free – this is for the safety of your dog, yourself, and the bear. If you are in close proximity to a bear, DO NOT try to first get a photo or video. Your first priority should be getting a safe distance between yourself and the bear.

In the rare instance when a bear appears to be aggressive toward people, residents should immediately contact DEEP's 24-hour dispatch line at 860-424-3333.

Topic: Protecting livestock and beehives with electric fences

Suggested photo: electric fence or bear at an electric fence (available upon request)

Installing an electric fence is the best way to protect backyard chickens, rabbits, goats, other livestock, and beehives from bears. A majority of the bear-livestock incidents in Connecticut involve chicken coops and are easily preventable through the use of electric fencing.

Electric fences can be installed to suit the user's needs, ranging from portable, quick set-up netting to semi-permanent wires, keeping your domestic animals in and wild animals out. There are also many creative ways to incorporate electric fencing into existing physical barriers, such as split-rail, chain-link, and chicken wire fences. Be sure to select the correct voltage to deter black bears. Compared to the cost of losing entire beehives and chickens from a destroyed chicken coop, most electric fence setups are also the economical way to go and have the added benefit of preventing bears from learning bad habits. Watch this video on electric fencing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RjFt1mSDL7E> and view these tips: https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/deep/wildlife/pdf_files/outreach/electric-fence-tips-bears.pdf.

Spring

Topic: Bears looking for bird seed and garbage after leaving winter dens

Photo of a bear on a deck (available upon request)

This is not a first sign of spring you want to see.

Black bears are emerging from their winter dens, and they will not turn down a free, easy meal like calorie-rich bird seed. Remove bird feeders and secure your garbage to make your yard less appealing to bears.

Topic: Birdfeeders and bears

Photo: Bear at feeder (available upon request)

Do not let this be the scene outside your window!

Early spring is when black bear activity increases, following the winter denning season. It is critical to ensure that bears do not have access to human-related food sources, such as bird seed. The CT DEEP Wildlife Division advises residents to take down, clean, and put away bird feeders from March through November. Some residents may need to stop feeding birds even earlier or all together if bears are active nearby.

While human-bear conflicts continue to rise and have become more severe, simple steps, such as reducing attractants around your home, can help greatly reduce the likelihood of encounters and potential conflicts with bears.

Topic: Take steps to reduce conflicts with bears (by changing reference to summer, this post can also be used over the summer months)

Suggested photo: Bear at birdfeeder, garbage can, etc.

Now that spring has arrived, black bears are leaving their winter dens and searching for food. Connecticut's extensive forests provide excellent habitat and plenty of natural food sources for bears.

#BeBearWise this spring and make sure bears do not have access to human-related food sources near your home. Take the following steps to reduce conflicts with bears:

- ✓ Remove birdfeeders and bird food from your yard starting in March through November. In areas with more bear activity, bird feeding may need to be discontinued altogether.
- ✓ Store garbage in secure, airtight containers inside a garage or other enclosed storage area. Garbage for pickup should be put outside the morning of collection and not the night before. Ask your garbage removal company if they provide bear-proof garbage cans.
- ✓ Keep barbecue grills clean and store them inside a garage or shed.
- ✓ Do not leave pet food outdoors or feed pets outside.
- ✓ Use electric fencing to protect your livestock, including chicken coops and bee hives. Electric fencing is relatively inexpensive and can easily be incorporated into existing structures.
- ✓ Report black bear sightings! Sighting reports help biologists learn where bears are active in our state and how they are involved in human-caused conflicts.

Questions about black bears? Go to <https://portal.ct.gov/deep/wildlife/bears/frequently-asked-questions-about-black-bears>

Summer**Topic: Natural foods vs non-natural foods for bears**

Photo: Collage of food items (can be provided upon request)

What do these food items have in common? They are all part of a black bear's natural diet. Contrary to popular belief, Connecticut's forests have a wealth of natural foods and places for black bears to live.

As omnivores, black bears eat a combination of plant and animal matter, with plant matter comprising the majority of their diet (60% or more). Time of year also dictates what bears are likely to be feeding on. For example, wetlands are particularly important in spring when emerging plants like skunk cabbage are one of the few available foods.

Other common diet options include grasses, forbs, leaves, nuts (i.e., tree nuts), and fruits and berries from various native trees and shrubs. Mature forests that provide acorns are particularly beneficial in late summer and fall when bears are fattening up for the coming winter.

The carnivorous side of a black bear's diet includes ants and bees, carrion, and occasionally small mammals or deer.

So, to answer the question, yes, there are plenty of natural foods on the landscape to support Connecticut's black bears!

What isn't part of a black bear's natural diet? Garbage, birdseed, and livestock. #BeBearWise and make sure your yard is free of these attractants and your livestock is secured. The CT DEEP website has tips on how to live with bears: <https://portal.ct.gov/deep/wildlife/bears/the-basics-of-living-with-black-bears>

Topic: Bears and BBQs/Picnics

Photo of a bear

Those ribs sure smell good, but you and your guests aren't the only ones enjoying that appetizing aroma. The black bear has an incredible sense of smell that is roughly 100 times better than ours and about 10 times better than the average dog! In other words, a bear can smell your holiday BBQ from quite a distance.

With summer grilling season upon us, here are a few tips from the CT DEEP Wildlife Division to keep bears off the guest list and help reduce human-bear conflicts.

- ✔ Clean up and secure food waste and garbage right away. This will also prevent other wild guests, like raccoons, skunks, and birds from causing messes.
- ✔ Clean grills after use. Empty grease traps and burn off food residue.
- ✔ Keep ground floor windows and doors of your house secured when you are not around. Bears can easily push in screens to gain access to food inside your home.
- ✔ If a bear makes an appearance at your gathering, try to scare the bear from your property from a safe location by shouting, waving your arms above your head, or making loud noises by hitting pots and pans together or using an air horn.

Bears that have easy access to human-associated food sources can quickly lose their fear of people and become habituated and food-conditioned. Food-conditioned bears pose a greater risk to public safety and often cause more property damage to houses, cars, and livestock. Although some may find a bear eating food scraps in their yard to be cute or funny, rather than taking photos or video, attempt to scare the bear away when you are in a safe location.

Topic: Summer get-togethers and bears

Suggested photo: Bear in yard

While celebrating this Fourth of July weekend, take a few simple steps to prevent conflicts with black bears and other wildlife:

- ✓ Avoid inviting unwanted “wild” guests by not leaving food out in the open for extended periods.
- ✓ Clean grills after cooking up those burgers and brats.
- ✓ Secure garbage so wildlife won’t make a meal of your food waste.
- ✓ When walking with your dog, keep it on a short leash so it stays under control if you encounter a bear.
- ✓ Always supervise pets when outside, for their safety and the safety of wildlife.
- ✓ Make sure birdfeeders have been put away for the summer.

Topic: Bears have plenty of natural habitat in CT (dispelling a common misconception)

Photo of a bear

A common misconception about black bears in Connecticut is that bears are being seen more around residential areas because people have developed or altered their habitat to the point where there is nowhere else for the bears to go and not enough natural food for them to survive. Simply put, this is not the case.

In fact, according to the CT DEEP Wildlife Division, Connecticut’s forests have a wealth of natural foods and places for black bears to live, and because there is plenty of suitable habitat, the black bear population is expected to continue to grow and expand.

The reason bears are often seen near homes is because they are looking for easily accessible, calorie-rich food sources like garbage, bird feeders, and unprotected livestock, including backyard chickens. Data collected from GPS-collared female bears shows that in many instances, these bears are choosing more developed areas over more rural, forested areas because of the presence of these human-associated food sources.

Although present in the region when the colonists arrived, black bears actually disappeared (were extirpated) from Connecticut by the mid-1800s due primarily to the loss of forests to farmland. However, over time, with a change in land use and a decline in farming, our forests grew back, thus providing perfect habitat for bears to return. Seeing the bear population expand into more parts of the state is a conservation success story, not one of bears losing their homes in the 21st century.

It is important to #BeBearWise and make sure your yard is free of attractants. Learn more at <https://portal.ct.gov/deep/wildlife/bears/the-basics-of-living-with-black-bears>

Fall

Topic: Fall hyperphagia when bears are consuming extra food to prepare for winter

Photo of a Bear

[#DYK](#) a black bear may consume roughly 20,000 calories in a single day during the fall months?! That’s the equivalent of 36 Big Macs! 🍔

Fall is the time of year when the appetite of black bears is biologically programmed to go into overdrive. Black bears will be consuming 10 times as many calories as they need during spring and summer in order to put on enough fat to carry them through the upcoming winter. This annual power-eating marathon is called hyperphagia.

While there are plenty of natural food sources (fruits and berries, calorie-dense acorns and nuts) across Connecticut's landscape for bears to bulk up on, it is critical to make sure they do not have access to people-related foods, most notably birdseed and garbage.

Topic: Fall hyperphagia when bears are consuming extra food to prepare for winter

Suggested photo: A bear with garbage

Hard mast, like acorns, beechnuts, and hickory nuts, is the most important source of food for bears as they prepare for winter. While Connecticut has plenty of natural food and habitat for bears, they will not pass up an easy meal from your backyard if birdfeeders are out and garbage is left unsecured. Conflicts associated with these human-related foods continue to increase each year, despite being preventable.

The CT DEEP Wildlife Division asks that you refrain from feeding birds until late November/early December, when most bears begin denning. Trash cans should always be secured or stored in an inaccessible area like a locked shed or garage to prevent bears from accessing them and not placed out until collection day.

Topic: Bears can still be active in colder weather

Photo: Bear at a feeder

Do not let the recent frosts and chilly mornings fool you. Black bears can be active any time of year and may still be stocking up on calories to help them get through the upcoming winter. Make sure they do not have access to human-related food sources, such as garbage and birdseed. Learn how to live with black bears at <https://portal.ct.gov/deep/wildlife/bears/the-basics-of-living-with-black-bears>

Winter

Topic: Bear winter dens/some bears can remain active in winter

Photo: Collage of bear dens (available upon request)

Black bear dens come in all shapes and sizes, and some of the most common dens include brush piles, slash piles, or fallen trees. Bears may also take advantage of rock crevasses and ledges and hollow trees as places to spend the winter.

In some cases, a black bear may even decide that its "den" is simply resting at the foot of a tree. These ground nests are usually just a sparse mat of leaves and twigs and are typically located in thick vegetation, such as mountain laurel. On occasion, bears will even den under decks and sheds in people's backyards.

While denning straight through most of winter is necessary for pregnant female bears, other bears can remain active, especially when temperatures are mild, and food is available. Even if you do not live in an area with regular bear activity, you should "Be BearWise" year-round. Learn more about black bears at <https://portal.ct.gov/deep/wildlife/fact-sheets/black-bear>

Suggested Hashtags: [#CTWildlife](#) [#Wildlife](#) [#BlackBear](#) [#Bear](#) [#Connecticut](#) [#ScareTheBear](#) [#BearWise](#) [#BeBearWise](#)

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