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# DEC Issues Guidance to Homeowners to Avoid Problems With Bears

## Warmer Spring Weather Is Here, Which Means New York's Black Bears Are on the Move

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) today issued guidance on how to prevent negative encounters with black bears. Nearly all negative bear encounters in New York are the result of hungry bears being attracted to human food sources. The simplest way to avoid a nuisance encounter is to remove potential food sources, which usually results in the bear moving on.

New York is home to between 6,000 and 7,000 bears that emerge from the winter denning period and need to replenish their nutrients and body fat. To do so, they may travel long distances to preferred habitats that vary from season to season. Bears must often cross roads or pass through developed areas to find these different habitat types, and they often find human foods readily accessible if homeowners do not take necessary precautions.

Not every bear that passes through a developed area is a problem bear, but readily available human food sources can quickly turn them into one. Bears can obtain all of the food they need from the forest but they are intelligent and opportunistic animals that will find and consume whatever food they can find most easily. Bird feeders, garbage cans, dumpsters, barbeque grills, unsecured out-buildings or vehicles containing food or waste are all potential attractants to bears.

Once a bear learns to obtain food from people or certain structures, it is very difficult to change the animal's behavior. These bears are more vulnerable to motor vehicle collisions in populated areas, more likely to be illegally killed, or may become a threat to public safety.

In some cases, DEC is asked to relocate these bears. However, bear relocations are rarely effective at solving the problem and can be dangerous. Relocated bears often return to their original capture site, or may simply continue their bad habits at a new location. Additionally, if the circumstances that led to the original problem are not corrected, other bears may be attracted to the site and the human/bear conflicts will persist.

It is dangerous and illegal to intentionally feed bears. The incidental, indirect feeding of black bears, such as with bird feeders or garbage is also unlawful.

Occasionally a bear becomes so habituated to human environments and conditioned to human foods that its behavior creates a clear threat to public safety and property. Extreme cases can result in requiring the bear to be put down to protect the public. It is in the best interest of both bears and people for bears to get their food solely from wild sources.

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To reduce the chance of negative black bear encounters around your home, DEC recommends these simple precautions:

* Never feed bears! It is illegal, dangerous and detrimental to bears.
* If you believe bears are being fed in your area, or suspect a nuisance bear situation, report it to DEC immediately.
* Take down bird feeders after April 1. Birds do not need supplemental food in the spring and summer, when natural foods are most abundant (even if you believe your birdfeeder to be inaccessible to bears, the birds will drop seed on the ground, which attracts bears to your yard).
* Clean off barbeque grills before night fall (don't forget the grease trap), and if possible, store grills inside when not in use.
* Store garbage in a secure building or location, secure can lids with ropes/bungees/chains; never over-fill cans, and dispose of garbage as frequently as possible.
* If you live in an area where bears may occur, put garbage containers out by the curb just before the scheduled pick-up - never the night before.
* If you live in a densely populated bear area, consider using a certified bear-resistant garbage container.
* Clean garbage cans frequently with ammonia products.
* Do not burn garbage: it is illegal and can attract bears.
* Do not add meat scraps, bones or melon rinds to your compost pile.
* Feed pets indoors and store pet food indoors. If pets must be fed outside, immediately remove all uneaten food and dishes.

It is important to appreciate and respect black bears as wild animals, from a distance.

To learn more about [New York's black bears](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/6995.html), visit the DEC website or look for DEC's DVD: 'Living with New York Black Bears', available at most local public libraries in New York.

For more information about bears in your area or to report a problem with black bears, contact the nearest regional DEC office. For listings of [Regional DEC Offices](http://www.dec.ny.gov/about/76070.html), visit the DEC website.