

Living in Harmony With Black Bears in Winding Cypress

- There are approximately 4,000 American Black Bears living in Florida. A full 25% of all Florida black bears are found in Southwest Florida (from Tampa south, but primarily concentrated along the west coast in Collier County.)
- Bears are a protected wildlife species in Florida. Killing a bear for any reason other than the bear causing direct harm **to you or another human** being is punishable by a fine and a potential prison term. Causing harm to a bear because it attacks, say, a pet is not permissible by law.
- The black bears do not want to interact with us. They are afraid of us.
 - Note that if a bear stands on its hind feet, it's likely trying to get a better look at something. It is not a defensive or aggressive posture.
 - If a bear paws the ground, snorts, clacks its teeth, or charges toward you, this is likely defending his territory/young. This behavior IS aggressive.
 - If you encounter a bear, never turn your back and run. It may trigger the predatory response in the bear. Calmly back up, raise your arms to appear as big as possible. You can yell something like "go away, bear!" In addition to your voice, a car alarm, air horn, loud whistle, or other loud noisemaker can scare a bear away. They do not like loud noises.
 - If the bear shows aggressive behavior, do **not** make eye contact. Remember, do NOT turn your back or run. Slowly back away with your arms raised and speak in a quiet voice.
 - Please be aware that an aggressive Florida black bear is **very rare**. (BE SURE TO WATCH THE VIDEO LINK BELOW, "Florida Black Bear Behavior.")
- Bears are omnivorous, with a diet largely consisting of berries and acorns in our area. Approximately 4% of their diet is meat, primarily opossum and armadillo.
- Bears are opportunistic feeders and seek easy food sources (primarily garbage, pet food, dirty grills, and birdseed.)
- Bears are neither nocturnal nor diurnal but are most active at dusk and dawn (crepuscular). However, Florida Fish & Wildlife (FFW)

have noticed the Florida black bears are becoming more nocturnal in a community area when they determine that *garbage cans are placed out overnight*.

- Both Collier County waste services and Florida Fish & Wildlife suggest either putting the trash out in the morning or acquiring a bear-proof can. If you do not want to purchase a can, there are ways to bear-proof a standard garbage can.
 - A bear-proof can undergoes rigorous testing - it must withstand one hour with a wild bear from the west, typically larger than our black bears, and remain intact.
 - Collier County waste has noticed that the locks on the existing cans are failing, occasionally not unlocking when the can is in the process of being emptied. The manufacturer is working on this and an ETA for the new cans is still pending.
- Bears travel many miles in a day and remember where there are food sources. The only time they euthanize a bear is if it is overtly aggressive and attacks a human being. (Note: a bear who strikes out at a human after being attacked, provoked, surprised, frightened, or threatened (especially a mama and her cubs) MAY ATTACK. That is not considered an aggressive bear, but a bear acting like a wild animal under threat. For that reason, FFW will not relocate bears unless they become overly aggressive without provocation, or act otherwise unsafe toward humans.
- Entering a screened area, knocking over garbage cans, or rooting in a garden is not considered unsafe bear behavior. That's why it is incumbent upon us to be prudent and bear-wise! Let's all do our part to live in harmony with nature. If we keep our garbage concealed in bear-proof containers in a closed garage until morning, do not approach or threaten bears, and remove any bear-enticing "snacks," the bears should get bored and move on.

Of interest, FFW noted that there has NEVER been a reported instance in Florida of a bear killing a human. Now that's good news!