Black bears and human populations commonly coexist in many parts of North America. Black bears occur throughout most of the Commonwealth, and residential areas of Virginia are encroaching into forested lands and habitats commonly used by wildlife, as human populations are also growing and spreading across most areas of Virginia.

Shared Responsibility

VDGIF will not trap or relocate a bear that is eating from your trash or birdfeeder. It is your responsibility to remove the attractants from your property once a bear discovers the food source. If it is unclear what is attracting the bear, VDGIF staff will help you identify the attractant so it can be removed and offer advice for deterring bears from your property.

**In most cases, a phone call to VDGIF is not necessary, if you REMOVE THE FOOD, the BEAR WILL LEAVE.**

You Can Keep Bears Wild

Bears are highly adaptable, intelligent animals and may learn to associate human dwellings with food. Bears are attracted to residential areas by the smell of foods people commonly put out around their homes. In reality, most problems caused by bears are really "people problems". It is up to humans to change their own behaviors to avoid conflicts. If addressed quickly, problems are often resolved immediately. After a few failed attempts to find food, bears will usually leave the area in search of their natural wild foods.

Black bears have a natural distrust of humans, are shy, and usually avoid people. However, bears habituated to humans by being provided a regular food source can cause property damage, lose their fear of humans and have to be destroyed. You can avoid this by doing the following:

* **Remove the bird feeders.** It is best not to put out food for birds from April - November. Instead, plant native seed- bearing plants or use water features to attract birds to your home.
* **Secure your garbage.** Store garbage indoors, in a shed or garage, or in a [bear-proof container](http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/problems/bears/bear-garbage-caddy.pdf) (PDF). Put garbage out on the morning of pickup, not the night before, or take it to the dump frequently.
* **Pick up pet food.** Feed pets only what they will eat in a single feeding or feed them indoors.
* **Remove all uneaten food.** Do not leave food out overnight.
* **Do not put meat scraps in the compost pile.** Keep compost away from house.
* **Pick up and remove ripe fruit** from fruit trees and surrounding grounds.
* **Clean the grill often.** Do not dump drippings in your yard. Run the grill an extra 5 minutes to burn off grease.
* **Install electric fencing** to protect beehives, dumpsters, gardens, compost piles, or other potential food sources ([instructions can be found here](http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/bear/))
* **Do not store food, freezers, refrigerators, or trash on porches.**
* **Use harassment techniques** in conjunction with removing the attractant to get the bear to move off your property. Paintballs are a great tool for hazing. They are nonlethal, will not harm the bear if shot at the rump, but are painful enough to get the bear moving away from homes.
* **Talk to your neighbors.** Make sure your neighbors and community administrators are aware of the ways to prevent bears from causing problems.
* **Learn about black bears!**

Remember, it is illegal to deliberately feed bears on both public and private lands. Even the inadvertent feeding of bears is illegal. ([4 VAC 15-40-282](http://leg1.state.va.us/cgi-bin/legp504.exe?000+reg+4VAC15-40-282))

Answers to commonly asked questions:

* **Under most circumstances, Department staff will not trap and relocate a bear from your property**: Most conflicts do not warrant trapping; a bear simply being in a neighborhood is not considered a threat or cause for trapping.
* **In most cases, it is a people problem**: Removal of the attractants on your property will solve the problem, without having to destroy the bear.
* **There are no places left in which to relocate bears every time there is a sighting**: Relocated bears will often return to the place where they were captured.

**If a bear is on or near your property, do not escalate the situation by approaching, crowding around, or chasing the bear.** This also applies to bears that have climbed up a tree. The best thing you can do is**leave it alone**. A bear that feels cornered will be looking for an escape route. By keeping people and pets away from the bear, you give it the best chance to come down from the tree and leave your property on its own. Bears generally avoid humans, but in their search for food, they may wander into suburban areas. The most important response is to keep a respectful distance.

**If you see a bear cub in an area do not try to remove it from the area or "save it".** Female bears will wander to find food usually with her cubs in tow. If she feels nervous, she will typically send her cubs up a tree and can leave the area. The mother bear will leave the cubs there until she returns and calls for them. Bear cubs left where they are will almost always be retrieved by their mother as long as there are no people or pets around.

The Department's Role

The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) has established bear guidelines that promote public safety, protect property, and conserve bear populations. Whenever possible, the Department's approach to managing bears encourages the coexistence of bears and humans. The specific response to bear issues is determined by public concerns, public safety, type and extent of damage, black bear biology, animal welfare, and available control methods.

When you call the Department, an employee will discuss the problem with you. In most cases, a telephone call will be all that is necessary to find successful solutions (usually the removal of attractants). At times, a Department employee may visit your property to discuss additional options.

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