

**Eastern America bears and your camp food** -- Field manual pgs 10,11  
by Ken Lent 12/10/98

**HOME**

Black bears usually won't bother with you, although a few unprovoked attacks on hunters and hikers have occasionally been reported. If you happen to somehow get between a mother and a cub, you might get a response out of "mom"; but generally these are creatures who want to stay away from man. However, the more common exception is when "smokey" gets a good sniff of your camp pancakes or canned spaghetti. Black bears love to sample our grocery store items and you can be asking for trouble if you have sloppy camp habits that invite bears to the dining table. Here's a few quick common sense tips to keep the bears away from camp:

While setting up camp in deep mountain areas, keep sleeping and eating areas separate. Cook and eat your meals 50 yards away from the place you will pitch your tent. This way any accidental spillage won't be attracting bears to your tent at night. Even if you don't spill anything, odors linger around for a long time, but aren't perceived by the human sense of smell. A bear can smell what you had for breakfast many hours after you have eaten it. At campgrounds you can probably get away with eating those corn chips in your tent at night, but don't practice this habit in the interior of the mountain regions. You are inviting night visitors if you munch on snacks in your tent.

Storing your food properly in the first place will go a long way in assuring that bears don't wind up insisting on trying to find out why your sleeping bag smells so good. Never store food in your tent or sleeping bag. Keep those food odors away from these two backpack items. Some state and national park trails have food storage devices at preselected camp areas. Follow directions if you have access to one of these.

If you are off trail camping, make sure that you store all food and trash in your pack at night, and get that pack up into a tree. Better yet, pack a separate "food storage pack" inside your backpack, which you can keep separate from your other items. You may wish to have your backpack inside your tent for access to tools, first aid kit, etc. For "de-scenting" your backpack, hold it over the campfire smoke for a few seconds. Make sure that your "food pack" is itself packed in a waterproof bag. You're going to be hoisting the food pack up in a tree at night where the bears can't get it, and if it rains the food must be kept dry. Although some trail campers just hoist their packs over a tree limb close to the tree trunk, they may fail to remember that bears can climb trees. If bears are determined enough they will get at your pack if it is twenty feet up a tree but close to the trunk itself. The below picture is the proper way to secure a food pack at night.



Find two trees approximately 20' apart with several limbs growing towards other from the two trees, at least 15 feet high. Tie one end of a rope around the first tree, then use a rock to throw the end over the first tree branch, as shown. Secure your food sack to the center of the rope. Throw the other end of the rope over the second branch, and hoist your pack up in-between the trees. Try to keep the pack itself about four feet from the closest limb after it is raised up into the trees. Tie off the other end of the rope around the trunk of the second tree.(diagram courtesy of U.S. National Parks Department of Interior)

### **Bear Bag Alternative**

Although the previous page and diagram are probably the safest way to secure your food in a tree pending a curious bear, this one works too if a proper choice of a tree limb is used. I don't think you will find this bear bag in a camping goods store, but possibly in a mail order catalog loaded with exotic gear. In any event, you can make this one yourself.

Purchase a waterproof nylon bag (it will be waterproofed on the inside) at your camper supply store. Dimensions are variable, but about 20" x 20" x 24" should be ample to hold substantial rations. Make sure this bag has a "drawstring top" that pulls shut. Next, purchase a another small bag called a "ditty bag". These are usually nylon nowadays as well, with a drawstring. A bag 3" x 5" will do. Purchase 50 feet of parachute cord or loose nylon "camo cord".

Tie, or attach with a snap, one end of the 50' cord to the drawstring of the waterproof bag. Using dental floss, fishing line, or nylon thread, sew the other end of the 50r cord to the small ditty bag so it is a very strong stitch. You now have a quick use bear bag for your camp food.

**HOW TO USE THIS BAG:** Put your camp food in the large waterproof bag and tightly draw the top shut. Find a tree at least 40 yards from your tent that has long branches and approximately 20' high. Make sure the branches appear no larger than 5 inches around where they grow from the tree trunk. (They will thin down the further out the limb goes) Make sure the branch is green, not dead, or it might break off and your food would wind up on the ground. Put a rock into the small bag and tie it shut. Throw the bag (cord attached) over the green limb at least 15 feet out from the trunk to a thinner part of the green limb. Haul the bag up to within two feet of the limb and tie it off on another close by tree. Note: Make sure to "twist" the opened end of the food bag and tie it tightly with another small piece of cord to keep water out in case of a heavy rain.

