

The American Legion Post #104 from Aloha, plays taps just after the 21-gun salute at the Vernonia Memorial Cemetery 2011 Memorial Day ceremonies.



## Know what to do if a bear comes to visit

Oregon is home to a healthy population of an estimated 25,000-30,000 black bears. During spring, Oregon's black bears are coming out of their winter dens. One was seen and hit by a vehicle on Hwy 47 just out of Vernonia recently.

This year, they may be hungrier than usual due to a poor berry crop in some parts of the state last summer and fall, and an unusually cool spring this year.

Bear damage complaints always begin to pick up in May, a time of year when bears should be eating insects and vegetation like grass or skunk cabbage until wild berries ripen in July. But bears will take an easy meal if they can find one, targeting garbage cans, pet food left outside, compost piles with food or fruit scraps, and bird feeders (incl. hummingbird feeders).

A bear that feeds on human food sources becomes a human safety risk if it is aggressive towards people, attacks pets, or attempts to enter a structure. Another sign that a bear is becoming a human safety risk is if it is seen repeatedly during daylight hours around residences. Last year, 36 bears were killed in western Oregon because they were considered human safety risks or nuisances.

Steps can be taken to stop bears from feeding on unnatural food sources:

- Maintain regular garbage service and

keep garbage inside a garage or shed until garbage day. Wash garbage cans to eliminate odor.

- Store pet food dishes and feed inside.
- Hang bird feeders away from the side of your home or tree trunk so bears can't reach them. Store birdseed inside and keep the feeder and area underneath clean.
- Keep barbecue grills clean.
- Compost only non-food items like leaves and grass in areas with bears.
- Electric fences are a very effective bear deterrent.

"Bear problems are predictable in that they almost always involve bears eating things people don't want them to eat," says Brian Wolfer, ODFW district biologist in Springfield. "Bears will return to eating natural forage if unnatural items are not available."

"Neighbors should work together to make sure everyone is doing what they can to not attract bears," he added.

While bear sightings are not unusual, attacks on humans are rare. If you encounter a bear:

- Give the bear a way to escape.
- Stay calm, do not run or make sudden movements.
- Face the bear and back away slowly.
- Avoid direct eye contact with the bear.
- Talk to the bear in a firm voice to let it know you are a human.
- Fight back if attacked. Shout, use rocks, sticks and hands to fend off an attack.

For more information about living with black bears, see the ODFW website at [www.dfw.state.or.us/wildlife/living\\_with/black\\_bears.asp](http://www.dfw.state.or.us/wildlife/living_with/black_bears.asp).

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