

BEAR SPRAY

Bear spray is proven to be effective in turning away a charging bear. It is a capsicum pepper based spray that irritates the bear's eyes, nose and lungs causing temporary blindness and breathing restriction. Using your bear spray during a defensive encounter where you have surprised a bear can save you from a mauling. The unusual sound and sight of deployed bear spray can sometimes be enough to startle the bear off its course. In no recorded case has bear spray permanently harmed the bear. In fact, getting sprayed might make the bear more wary of humans.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

Be sure you buy canisters labelled 'Bear Spray' or 'Bear Pepper Spray' or 'for deterring bear attacks'. Some products labelled 'Pepper Spray' or for 'personal protection' are not meant for use on bears. Purchase a belt or chest holster to carry the bear spray.

Check the expiry date on the canister and replace it when it's outdated. The pepper part of the spray does not deteriorate but the aerosol part does.

Carry a large canister, 225 grams (7.9 ounces) or more with a high level of active pepper ingredient, 1 to 2 percent capsicum. Make sure your bear spray is a fogger and not a stream pattern. Also, this is not the time to go cheap so don't go for the lowest price.

Each person in the party should carry bear spray. A 225 gram canister only contains enough bear spray for about 8 seconds of use. Keep it accessible on your person at all times – even when going for a nature call, leaving camp for a short fishing trip, and especially when cooking in camp. It won't do you any good metres away on your pack if a bear is attracted by food smells and comes into camp. This also applies when you live or work in bear country – even when going for a walk on your property, fencing or working around cereal crops. It won't do you any good if you left in the house or vehicle.

HOW TO USE BEAR SPRAY

Attach the bear spray canister to your belt, chest holster or pack so it's instantly available – do not carry it in your pack and not under your clothing. It won't do you any good if you can't get to it and be ready to spray it in 2 seconds.

Draw your spray and remove the safety clip immediately upon sighting a bear at close range. Hold the spray handle with the thumb of one hand and grasp the canister firmly in the other hand.

Evaluate the wind direction – if possible, rotate so the wind is at your back.

Don't attempt to spray unless the bear approaches within 9 m (30 feet).

If the bear approaches to 9 m (30 feet), give it a short warning blast (of 1/2 second), placing a cloud of spray between you and the bear. Aim low in front of the bear so the animal moves its head into the spray.

If the bear continues to approach and gets within 6 m (20 feet), give it 1 or 2 more blasts (of 1 to 2 seconds) aiming at the face.

If the bear approaches within 3 m (10 feet), give it more 1 or 2 more blasts aiming directly into the bear's face and eyes – continue to fire until the bear retreats or the canister is empty.

A bear charging at you when it is hit by bear spray may not be able to change its trajectory so be prepared to step aside. After spraying, retreat but do not run, do not turn your back on the bear, and as the bear leaves go in another direction

Watch the Alberta Environment and Parks video on the proper way to use bear spray:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VDgBY2PbnO4&list=PL11233C0B2B01B061&index=3>

Practice using your bear spray and learn how far it sprays and for how long. Remember the limited range of the spray, usually 6-9 m (20 to 30 feet). Read the directions on the bear spray container or packaging. Buy an extra canister or use an expired one, test-fire it and then dispose of it properly. Don't test-fire into the wind because it can drift back and give you the personal experience of what a bear feels like when sprayed. Don't test-fire it in bear country where the lingering smell might actually attract bears. Bear spray does not function like bug spray so do not spray it on your tent, clothing or yourself.

Having bear spray on your belt or pack doesn't mean you can skip any of the necessary bear safety precautions of proper food and garbage handling, travelling in groups, making noise, dog on a leash, etc. Bear spray does not make you bear proof – it is merely your next-to-last line of defense. If it doesn't turn away the bear, your only remaining options are playing dead (in a defensive attack only) or physical resistance.

Bear spray should not be stored inside a vehicle. It should be transported in a bear spray carrier in the trunk or box of a vehicle. It is illegal to transport bear spray in luggage on a commercial airline.