Keep Bears Out of Garbage

Things we throw away can be food to a bear, including solid and liquid waste, recycling, and compost. Bears can smell food and trash from miles away, and if they get into them once, they’re hooked. Secure these items for your safety, your neighbors’ safety, and the bear’s safety.

Garbage and Recycling

Garbage is the most common human-bear conflict. Recycling waste can also attract bears because of food and drink residue in packaging.

To keep bears out of garbage and recycling, store it in a bear-resistant container or in a secure building at all times—doing both is ideal—until the day of disposal.

If you use a trash hauling service:
Contact your trash hauler directly to request a bear-resistant canister. These cans may come with a small additional service fee. Do not buy your own can without first talking with your trash hauler, as they may require using their cans.

If you haul your trash to a dump or transfer station:
Buy a certified bear-resistant canister. Look for cans sold as bear-resistant from the brands Toter (in 64 and 96 gallon cans) or Kodiak (in 65 and 95 gallon cans). Kodiak cans are also sold by Bearicuda as the “Stealth 2” canister. You can buy these products at some hardware stores, including Home Depot, Lowe’s, and Ace Hardware. If they are not available in-store, they can often be ordered in or purchased online.

Kodiak and Toter cans are certified “bear-resistant” by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC), meaning they’ve met specific criteria and passed a live bear test using captive grizzlies. To check if a product is actually bear-resistant or to see the full array of bear-resistant products, visit IGBConline.org/programs/bear-resistant-products.

No matter how your trash gets to the dump:
- Don’t overfill your can.
- Make sure the lid is closed and locked.
- Keep your garbage inside a hard-sided, secure building, even if you have a bear-resistant can, until the day of disposal.

For recycling: There is no specific certified bear-resistant container for home recycling. Some people use a second bear-resistant trash can or simply keep recycling inside until disposal.
Compost

Food smells from compost attract bears. If you compost outside, surround compost piles or containers with an electric fence. You may also choose to use a bear-resistant container. There are no IGBC certified bear-resistant composters, but some brands hold up to bears better than others, like the Good Ideas brand Compost Wizard Dueling Tumbler, available online.

Beyond securing your compost, decrease the smell:

- When adding new food scraps, mix them in to the pile instead of leaving them on top.
- Avoid adding meat, bones, dairy products, fatty items, and unrisned eggshells.
- Make sure you have a mix of ingredients to help compost break down quicker and smell less. Combine “green” items (kitchen scraps, vegetables, small amounts of fruit) with at least double the amount of “brown” items (dead leaves, dry garden and grass clippings, wood chips, egg cartons, newspaper, cardboard).

Learn more about reducing compost odors at bearwise.org/six-bearwise-basics/food-garbage.

Restaurant and Business Food Waste

Restaurants produce large amounts of food waste that can attract bears. If waste is taken away by a trash hauler, contact the hauler to get a bear-resistant dumpster. If the business hauls its own waste, the owner or manager should consult the certified bear-resistant product list at IGBConline.org/programs/bear-resistant-products for the right solution.

Grease containers that store used cooking oil are a common bear attractant. Depending on how grease is collected, a bear-resistant food storage box can be used, like the Selway Series S111 from Bear Guardian. Similar products can be found on the certified bear-resistant product list. If a container is outside, it should be bolted to a cement pad or secured in a way so a bear can’t tip it over. If there is room, grease containers can be stored in a locked, hard-sided building. If grease containers and garbage are kept in a central location outside, they can be secured using a storage shed that is protected by offset electric wire.

Contact People and Carnivores to receive a Restaurant Bear Safety Kit that has resources for businesses to keep bears out of food waste and guests and employees safe.

To learn more: Visit peopleandcarnivores.org or email info@peopleandcarnivores.org.