

New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Division of Fish and Wildlife biologists, along with DEP Commissioner Bob Martin, are reminding the public to remove food sources from around their homes to prevent difficult encounters with bears this fall. Black bears are starting to fatten up for winter denning and will more actively forage for food in the coming weeks.

The DEP has issued a press release advising residents living in areas frequented by bears to take the following precautions to minimize bear encounters:

- * Never feed a black bear.
- * Use certified bear-resistant garbage containers. They offer the best protection. Otherwise, store all garbage in containers with tight-fitting lids and place them within a secure location, where bears are unlikely to see or smell them.
- * Put out garbage on collection day, not the night before.
- * Wash garbage containers frequently with a disinfectant solution to remove odors. Draping rags soaked in bleach over your garbage containers also helps to eliminate odors.
- * If you choose to feed birds, do so during daylight hours only, between December 1 and April 1, when bears are least active. Suspend the birdfeeder from a free-hanging wire, making sure it's at least 10 feet off the ground and away from the trunk of a tree. Bring the feeder indoors at night. Clean up spilled seeds and shells daily.
- * Clean up after pets. If you must feed them outside, immediately pick up any leftover food and remove the food bowls after they have finished.
- * Clean outdoor grills and utensils thoroughly after each use and store grills securely. Grease and food residue can attract bears.
- * Do not place meat, dairy or any sweet foods in compost piles.
- * Residents who have fruit or nut trees on their property should recognize that bears may be attracted to any residual fruit or nuts left on the ground. Removing fallen fruit or nuts will minimize bear activity in your yard.
- * Properly installed electric fencing is an effective and efficient way of protecting crops, beehives and livestock.
- * Report bear damage, nuisance behavior or aggressive bears to the local police department and to the DEP's hotline at (877) WARN DEP.

To view the press release visit http://www.state.nj.us/dep/newsrel/2010/10_0101.htm on the DEP web site; for information on New Jersey's black bears, visit <http://www.njfishandwildlife.com/bearfacts.htm> on the division's web site.