



# Florida Black Bear

**Smell test.** Look at the bear's long snout. That big nose should help you remember that the bear is able to sniff something that is up to a mile away! Have you heard about the bear that raided a vacation home and ate all the canned goods except for two unopened cans of sauerkraut? That is just one of many stories about bears' amazing sense of smell.

**Menu for a Florida black bear:** Florida black bears are omnivores, eating both plants and animals. Their diet is mostly vegetarian sprinkled with insects, with animals being only 5 percent of their food. A bear's menu includes: saw palmetto, corn, persimmon, sunflower, oak, wild coffee, blackberry, blueberry, sassafras, ferns, bees, wasps, yellow jackets, carpenter ants, beetles, crayfish, bird eggs, alligator eggs, armadillos, opossums, rabbits, raccoons and turtles. Honey, naturally, is also a favorite.

**You thought just teenagers were hungry?** Florida black bears become eating machines in the fall when they need to bulk up for their winter naps – their appetites quadruple from eating 5,000 calories a day up to 20,000 calories a day. This brings us to what humans can do to protect both themselves and bears. Please keep garbage away from bears. Store your garbage in a garage or sturdy shed, or get a bear-proof garbage can or dumpster. Bring pet food or bird seed inside at night. Put an electric fence around beehives, gardens and livestock. Otherwise bears may be tempted to leave the forest to get food in your neighborhood. Chomping down a 25-pound sack of dog food is easier for bears than looking for 11,000 acorns to get the same calories. But when bears begin to hang out in places where people are, they can get into trouble. It not only is illegal in Florida to leave out food for bears, but eliminating food sources that will attract bears is also the best thing you can do to prevent human-bear conflicts.

**Jarhead:** A little bear in big trouble. A bear family was doing what it shouldn't be doing, rummaging through garbage cans in a small community near the Ocala National Forest in summer 2010. A resident called the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) to report that one of the bear cubs was running around with a big clear plastic jar stuck over its head. It sure looked funny, but the little bear – now nicknamed Jarhead – would die from starvation if FWC could not catch it and remove the container. Traps were set and the bears were tracked for eight days based on sightings. Then the bear family disappeared. Just as the FWC team almost gave up, Jarhead and his family reappeared. Mother bear was successfully tranquilized and Jarhead was caught and freed from his weird headgear. The family later was released in a more remote area. A happy ending for Jarhead and a reminder why people should keep their garbage away from bears.



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