

Working in Bear Country - Carry **Bear Spray** & Know How To Use It

When working in bear country, your best strategy to avoid an encounter with a bear is to **make lots of noise**, **stay in groups** and **be alert for signs of bears in the area**. Diggings, scat, visible tracks and overturned logs and rocks, are all early warning signs that bears are around.

In the rare case of an aggressive confrontation, bear spray is your best defense. Recent reports show bear pepper spray to be more effective than a bullet in diverting or stopping a charging bear.

When choosing a bear spray make sure that it has the following features:

- Minimum weight of 7.9 ounces
- Minimum spray range of 15 feet
- Expiry date clearly noted



Be sure to **read the manufacturer's instructions** on proper use of your spray.

Bear spray is useless in a backpack, or left near your lunch. It needs to be carried in a holster within easy reach on your dominant side. Keep it in your tent at night and in your cooking area, always readily available should a surprise encounter occur. Keep the safety clip on at all times and remove only in the event of an encounter with a bear.

First time users can conduct a test spray outside, spraying downwind but remember every test spray reduces the canister's effective spray time. It is important to track the time remaining on a canister carefully. There are special cans which be purchased cans for training purposes from Bear Scare www.bearscare.ca

Never spray bear pepper spray on gear, lunch areas or backpacks to repel bears. Used in this manner, once the irritating and volatile components have broken down, the remaining pepper residue will actually attract bears.

The most intense effects of bear pepper spray may last 30-45 minutes. It is potent enough to cause extreme discomfort and damage to the eyes if it is accidentally released at close range. Flushing the affected skin with water can help, but expect to be uncomfortable for 15 to 60 minutes. It does not cause any permanent damage.

Be aware that extreme heat or cold may affect the performance of the product. Canisters have been known to explode if left in a vehicle in summer. Always make sure to have your bear spray in a safe puncture resistant container; either in a PVC pipe flask, or a premade purchased bear spray travel pack.

Remember, bear spray is your last defense - your best defense is to avoid an encounter altogether by making lots of noise, being aware of your surroundings and watching for signs of bears in the area.

Buying Bear Spray: Purchasing Guide

- **strength:** spray should have a minimum concentration of 0.857% capsaicin
- **container size:** spray should be at least 225 grams or 7.9 ounces of net weight
- **type of sprayer:** spray pattern should be in a cloud/cone pattern
- **length of spray:** spray should last at least 8 seconds
- **range:** spray should have a range of 5 meters or about 16 feet
- **type:** not all "pepper sprays" are the same: ensure that you are using a bear deterrent spray, not a personal defence product (where legal), like mace, designed for use on people or dogs
- **number:** try to carry at least two canisters per group
- **shelf life:** should have a shelf life of 4 years after initial purchase
- **certification:** in Canada, bear spray does not have to be certified or tested - therefore, it is essential that you purchase your spray from a reputable company

"Even a skilled marksman with steady nerves may have a slim chance of deterring a bear attack with a gun." - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Reputable companies

The Get Bear Smart Society recommends: [Frontiersman](#), [Counter Assault](#), [Defense Aerosols](#) (Yukon Magnum and Bear Defence Professional) and [UDAP](#). You can also purchase a [survival kit](#).

How bear spray works

The aerosol can shoots bursts of atomized capsaicin (a red pepper derivative) up to eight metres, though the spray is most effective at short range. Bear pepper spray causes the membranes of the eyes, nose and lungs of a bear to swell and the result is a nearly total, yet temporary, loss of sight and severe restriction of breathing. To be effective, bear spray has to hit the eyes and nose of the bear. Most times, bears that are sprayed leave the area allowing you time to recede.

How to use bear spray

Always carry bear spray so that it is readily available to you, preferably in a holster worn on a belt or pack. If a bear is approaching or charging you, use the spray to deter the bear.

- remove safety clip
- steady your arm and depress trigger with thumb
- deploy in 2 - 3 second bursts
- aim from the knees up to the face and make a cross (or cloud)
- do not use the entire contents as more than one application may be needed