

Fruit Trees and Wildlife

A Guide to Reducing Human-Wildlife Conflict

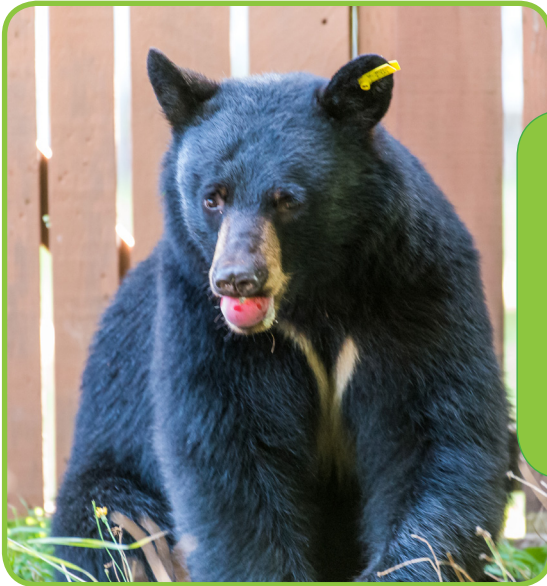


Fruit and nut trees are often cherished for their blossoms and food value. They can also be part of a local food strategy. However, neglected trees can lead to the spread of disease and draw bears and other wildlife into communities. Domestic fruit and nut trees are unnatural food sources for bears and other wildlife. They are highly dense in calories and can lead to food conditioning.

Food conditioning is a learned behaviour where animals begin to associate people and their property with a food reward. Bears may go after fruit before it is fully ripe and will often return year-after-year. They will often damage tree branches, fences and other property in the process.

We often plant fruit/nut trees close to our homes. This can also draw bears into our neighbourhood which puts us, and others, at risk of a dangerous wildlife encounter. Once the harvest wanes, a food-conditioned and human-habituated bear may turn to other sources of food nearby, such as garbage. This can lead to poor outcomes for that bear such as vehicle collisions or injury from eating dangerous items. Bears that forage for food in communities may become more assertive and this can lead to damaged property, bears entering enclosed spaces, and safety concerns for the community. Hundreds of bears are destroyed by the Conservation Officer Service every year as a result of food conditioning.

The best way to keep people and wildlife safe is to prevent wildlife from accessing human sources of food. There are a number of strategies and solutions to not only prevent wildlife conflicts but also produce a healthier and more productive crop.



What's the harm in letting bears access fruit in our neighbourhoods?

Fruit is a strong wildlife attractant, the same as garbage but even more reliable and consistent. It teaches a bear to find food near people. This can be dangerous for the people in your community and the bear.



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Feed People, Not Bears Help Keep Wildlife Wild

Harvest fruit frequently. Do not let it accumulate on the ground. Not only does this attract predators but it can lead to pest infestations and disease.

Seek out local fruit tree projects or fruit-gleaning organizations, contact your local food bank, or reach out to local farmers that need feed for livestock.

Use the power of social media to connect with others to swap and share fruit and other produce.

Keep trees pruned and a manageable size as they will be easier to pick and produce better fruit.

Bears may access fruit before it is fully ripe. Consider an electric fence. These can be installed temporarily or permanently to protect fruit trees and other attractants.

When composting fruit on site, do not add large quantities at a time. Freeze and add small amounts at a time. Do not compost fruit infested with codling moth larvae.

If you do not have capacity to manage a fruit tree, consider replacing it with a variety that does not bear fruit or nuts, preferably a native variety.

Become informed. Many communities now have bylaws with regards to fruit trees, either to prevent wildlife conflicts or to prevent disease transmission to agricultural crops.



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