

Bears problems in your neighborhood? A "Bear Rack" may be the solution for you.

Article by Beth Terry, October, 2000

According to Fish and Game, there are approximately two dozen black bears that spend part of the summer in or adjacent to residential areas in the Hillside area. Four or five brown bears are seen in residential areas each summer. And the number of bears shot each year in defense of life or property is increasing. Bears generally are out of their dens from late April until the snow piles up in October or November. They are frequently seen in residential areas from May through early June. Why are bears hanging around in the neighborhoods? They are looking for food, and the pickings are pretty easy. Garbage, dog food, and bird seed are all tasty treats to a bear. And if you think that a bear can't possibly get to the bird feeder hanging off the deck on the third story of your house, think again!

This Spring, my family and I moved into a new house. We emptied the bird feeders and kept our garbage indoors. Not a problem when you have a garage. However, the duplex on the lower part of the property does not have a garage. The tenants put their garbage into cans that were kept in a wooden container. In July, the upstairs tenant was awakened by a mother black bear on her deck, who was feasting on garbage and pushing on the window. A police officer was dispatched to scare away the bear. However, two cubs treed themselves and the tenant was "held hostage" for four hours until the cubs finally came down. At that point we decided to rent a "Bear Rack" from Anchorage Refuse. This cage was delivered to our home, holds three garbage cans, and has worked beautifully. It is easy to use and at least on two occasions the bear tried unsuccessfully to get into it, despite a very simple latching mechanism. Shortly after we began using the cage, the bear left our area.

The only down side to this story is the price of the "Bear Rack". Anchorage Refuse charges \$650 for a product that should really cost \$200. Apparently there just isn't enough demand to bring the price down. **Folks, we do have a problem on the Hillside, and there should be a demand for this item!** I could see a healthy cottage industry for someone who wanted to manufacture these cages out of their garage. The cage that the refuse company makes consists of only about \$50 in materials. In the meantime, for a much more reasonable rate, you can rent a "Bear Rack" from the refuse company at \$20 a month, and save money by turning it back into the company during the winter months. There is also an affordable (\$76) bear proof garbage can available from Unitech of Alaska, described as a 55 gallon drum with a locking lid. The open top steel drum weighs 53 lbs. and takes a 5/8 inch wrench to open it, so it would not be as convenient as the "Bear Rack" but the price difference is substantial.

Many of us moved to the Hillside because we love the wilderness flavor of the area. We enjoy the local wildlife in our backyards, but we can also see the potential dangers. A local expert has stated there is a strong likelihood that within the next ten years, someone, probably a child, will be killed on the Hillside by a bear. But this is a tragedy that could be prevented with a simple lifestyle change by the people in our neighborhoods. Are we willing to go to the effort?