

# Bear spray or bullets?

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ISLAND PARK-For many people, the first thing that comes to mind when presented with a charging bear scenario is to shoot the bear. But have you ever considered using bear spray? After all, guns are made to kill whereas bear spray, is not.

You might think guns would provide better personal protection but research suggests that human-bear encounters involving firearms are far more likely to result in injury to humans.

According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Law Enforcement Personnel, even experienced hunters who use firearms to defend themselves suffer injury 50% of the time. Persons defending themselves with bear spray escaped injury most of the time and those that were injured experienced shorter attacks and less severe injuries.

Canadian bear biologist Dr. Stephen Herrero believes a person's chance of incurring serious injury doubles when bullets are fired versus when bear spray is used.

So while a gun can kill a bear, can a shooter be accurate enough to prevent a serious even fatal attack? It takes nerves of steel to shoot a charging grizzly accurately when zigzagging through dense brush. What if you miss or worse yet, injure the bear? An injured grizzly is a very dangerous grizzly. On the other hand, bear spray has been found to actually cancel the instinctive defensive rage of an attacking bear by temporarily interfering with its senses. U.S. Forest Service, State Fish and Game and National Park Service personnel carry bear spray in a holster on their belts when working in grizzly country, just in case of an unexpected encounter.

Bear spray has been shown to be more effective than a bullet in diverting or stopping a charging bear, according to the Center for Wildlife Information in Missoula, Montana. It is easy to use and lightweight so you can feel good about taking it along on an all-day hike or a hunting trip.

Bear spray is a high pressure extract of about two percent capsaicin and related capsaicinoids. When a bear is sprayed, it will experience choking, coughing, decreased breathing, burning, watery eyes, and nose and nausea along with the temporary loss of its senses.

Bear spray can be bought at most sporting goods stores, and in Ashton and Island Park, the Ranger Stations along with most of the convenience stores are now carrying it. Be careful to buy bear spray, not personal defense spray or law enforcement spray. It will have an EPA number on the canister and an expiration date. It will also clearly state that it is intended for use on bears as a bear deterrent. Pepper sprays and personal defense sprays are not the same as bear spray.

Also look for the percent of capsaicin and related capsaicinoids-it will be between 1 and 2 percent.

Bear spray is a specific formulation of active ingredients, propellants, and solvents with a spray mechanism designed specifically for use on bears.

Spray time-canister should hold 6 to 9 seconds of spray.

Weight of canister-at least 7.9 ounces or 225 grams

Spray range-bear experts recommend a range of 25 feet.

How to Use Bear Spray. Bear spray is useless in a backpack and must be carried on a hip or chest holster, ready for immediate use. Extreme heat or cold may affect the performance along with wind, rain or thick brush.

Bear spray is not to be used as a repellent. Do not spray your kids with it! It has happened. Also, do not spray your tent, packs, or other gear.

Bear spray is a bear deterrent, meaning it is designed to stop a charge and make the bear move off. Bear spray should only be used if you are faced with an aggressive bear or are charged by a bear and should be used as your last line of defense. Direct the canister toward the charging bear, slightly downward and begin spraying as the approaching bear is 40 to 50 feet away which allows the spray to take effect. The bear will meet the expanding cloud at about 30 feet and will have to pass through it to reach you. Once it feels the effects of the active ingredients it will break off its charge.

For more details on how to use bear spray go to [www.centerforwildlifeinformation.org](http://www.centerforwildlifeinformation.org) or [www.igbconline.org](http://www.igbconline.org).

Understanding why bears attack, how to avoid those situations and what to do in case of an attack is critical when traveling in bear country. Of course, nothing is 100% effective against an aggressive bear and most bear spray failures are due to the use of bear spray knock-offs such as pepper or personal defense sprays but proper BEAR SPRAY has been shown to be the best method for deterring a threatening or attacking bear and preventing severe injuries to people and bears alike.

If you would like to have a bear spray demonstration or would just like to practice using a can, please contact Lynn at the Island Park Ranger Station at 208.558.7301