



Protecting Your Food in the Wild

Keep yourself and the woodland critters safe when you bring food with you on the trail

Entering a wilderness for any period of time is like being a guest at another person's house. Except in this case, the animals are the owners of the house. As the owners of the house, they feel quite entitled to enjoy any food that is on the premises – even if this food is yours!

However, as a hiker it's quite important that you not allow animals access to your food, even if it is extra or left over. Not only is it generally not good for them nutritionally, but they are quick to grow overly dependent on humans for food. Areas frequented by hikers can potentially be overrun by scavengers looking for a free meal. Keep these tips in mind when handling food on the trail and at your campsites.

Pack it in, pack it out – Every little thing that you introduce into the wilderness should be taken out when you leave. While you may remember to throw food packaging in a trash bag you bring with you, don't forget to pack up bits of food you may have spilled.

Animal proof your food – Popular visitors of campsites and popular hiking areas other than humans are mice and bears. Be aware that mice and a few other critters can stealthily gnaw through your pack to get to food stored inside of it. Mice can also leave droppings in stuff sacks containing food and contaminate your foodstuffs.

You can prevent animal theft with a bear bag – a stuff sack filled with food and “smellables” (items such as toothpaste, deodorant, etc.) and tied to a rope thrown over a tree branch. (Put a small rock in a stuff sack secured to the end of the rope and toss!) Keep the bag at least 12 feet off the ground and 10 feet from the trunk of the tree. Replace the stuff sack with your food bag and raise it 12 feet off the ground. Secure the other end of the rope around the tree trunk. Do so carefully, so as not to damage the tree.



Many shelters on high-use trails have string hung from the ceiling and running through the middle of an upside down tuna can. Food can be hung here and out of the way of mice.

Separate sleeping and cooking areas – Even if you’ve practiced Leave No Trace policies to a tee, you’ll have an impossible time removing the odor of cooked food from an area. That can only be removed with time. As the smell slowly disperses, it may attract a few unwelcome guests. Sleep at least 200 feet from where you cooked and stored your food, otherwise you may wake up with a few late night camp visitors.

Use common sense!

- Take food that you and your group like so none of it gets wasted. Just because something is labeled as backpacker food doesn’t mean it will be tasty to you.
- Don’t bring food that spoils easily; this can lead to frustration and the dumping of unwanted food.
- Color code your stuff sacks or label with duct tape so you don’t spend heaps of time searching through your gear. Putting all your food in stuff sacks is also important in case its packaging breaks. That way your food only spills in the separate sack and not over everything in your backpack.

