



2014 Wilderness Food Storage Guidance



Examples of containers allowed for use in these parks from left to right: Wild Ideas Bearikade, Bear Vault BV 250 & 300, Counter Assault Bear Keg, and Garcia Backpacker 812-C.

Present Policy

In 2014, these parks **strongly recommend** that all campers carry all food, garbage, and toiletries in a park-allowed, animal-resistant food-storage container (backpack type or pannier). As the parks continue their efforts to remove broken and unused metal food storage boxes from the wilderness, previous locations of boxes may not be guaranteed.

NOTE: This recommendation is in addition to the existing requirements to carry and use park-allowed, animal-resistant food-storage containers in three specified areas: 1) Rae Lakes Loop and vicinity 2) Dusy and Palisades Basins and 3) Rock Creek drainage.

Black Bears and Food

To preserve black bears in their natural state and to protect human safety, it is critical that all food be made unavailable to bears.

Intelligent and curious, black bears (*Ursus americanus*) are highly motivated to find high-calorie food. In these parks, many bears have learned that the presence of humans means the presence of such food. Once bears obtain our food, they become increasingly bold, destructive, and potentially dangerous in their quest for more. The result can be disastrous human-bear interactions. Vacations are ruined when bears continually harass campers. Bears frequently destroy property and occasionally injure people while seeking human food. Such bears may have to be killed due to safety concerns.

A Short History of Food Storage

At one time, backpackers slept with their food to keep bears away. Not only did bears figure this out, but it was dangerous. People switched to hanging food over a branch and tying rope to the tree's trunk. After bears foiled this method, people hung food using the counter-balance technique, in which no rope is tied to the trunk. Again, bears found ways to obtain the food. They bit through branches, jumped down onto the food, and shook trees until one bag dropped low enough to

A Short History of Food Storage (continued)

reach. As a result, bears received food rewards for their efforts and our wild areas were left with broken branches and dangling ropes in tangled messes.

Park managers tried alternatives to the counter-balance method, installing cables and poles in some wilderness areas where campers could hang food. While a good idea, these quickly proved difficult to maintain, were aesthetically undesirable, and, of course, were not always bear-resistant.

In the mid-1980s, a few metal food-storage boxes were placed in the wilderness as an experiment. By 1989, many more had been put in. Unlike other methods, bears could not obtain food from these boxes and bear-human incidents dramatically decreased. Unfortunately, other problems developed. The boxes require frequent maintenance and are not large enough to hold all of the food that people want to put in them. All too often, they are used for garbage which must then be hauled out by others. Boxes are also seen by many as an intrusion in the Wilderness, where the “imprint” of humans is required to be minimal.

Through the years, portable containers were designed, tested, and made commercially available. In 1991, only 1% of wilderness visitors carried these containers. This increased to half of the wilderness users by 1999; even more use them today. While this trend is promising, human-bear incidents and injuries continue, leading these parks to require portable container use in a few areas starting in 2000. By 2003, portable containers became required in the Rae Lakes, Dusy Basin, and Rock Creek areas of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks.

With these requirements in place, incidents have continued to decrease.

How can I help
preserve
wilderness *and*
wild bears?

- When visiting wilderness, carry all of your food, garbage, and toiletries in a park-allowed, animal-resistant food-storage container. Remove any such items that you won't be taking with you from your vehicle and put them in the metal food-storage boxes provided at trailheads.
- Visit our website, www.nps.gov/seki/planyourvisit/bear_bc.htm, for ideas and information about how to efficiently pack a portable food container.
- If you experience a negative encounter with a bear, please report to the nearest park ranger. You can also provide reports to nps_seki_bear_mgmt@nps.gov

For more information about visiting the Sequoia-Kings Canyon Wilderness visit
www.nps.gov/seki/planyourvisit/wilderness.htm.
You may also contact the Wilderness Office by phone at 559-565-3766 or by e-mail at
SEKI_Wilderness_Office@nps.gov
