

Bears and Scent



The first time a big black bear stuck its head out of the brush to look at the bait barrel I raised the muzzleloader to get ready for the shot. Well, my brain signaled this to happen. My arms, however, never got the message. The massive adrenaline surge coursing through my body jammed the order.

That bear never presented a shot anyway, choosing instead to stare at the bait for a few seconds with only its head clear of the screen of brush before melting back into the thick Minnesota woods. That is bear hunting over bait. One second you are cussing the ground squirrels and then next there is a big, beautiful bear at 20 yards.

Quite often bear baits are a reflection of the outfitter or hunter placing it. Several years ago I hunted with Big Paws Outfitters near International Falls, Minnesota, and their baits were giant. At the base of each bait pile was a 50 pound bag of dog food, and all types of additional food were piled on top, from old bread to giant gobs of marshmallow and caramel candy bars. The baits were freshened every day.

I have also seen other outfitters use a half a bucket of bread and rolls sweetened with grease and other "secret" ingredients. Both of these extremes work, and the difference comes in the philosophies of the outfitter or hunter.



In the first camp mentioned, the philosophy of providing a buffet of mammoth size guaranteed a reliable food source that big bears could claim as their own, and no matter when the bear visited there would be something for his sweet tooth. It worked, too, with everyone in camp getting an opportunity at a big bear.

Douglas Teel Jr., owner/operator of Northridge Outfitters Guide Service in Maine, is proud of his baits. He uses 55 gallon drums of special granola. "It's Day's Bait," Teel said over the phone one day last summer while guiding a client to smallmouth bass on the Penobscot River. "It's got oats, chocolate chips, caramel, peanut butter, all kinds of good stuff. You open the barrel and want to eat it, not put it out for the bears."

Teel runs 65 bait sites that are re-baited every day,

and believes that to keep a big bear around you have got to pour the bait to them. "The big ones come in last and if there's no food there, they'll go somewhere else," he said.

At the other extreme was the philosophy of Martin Laviolette of Hunter's Paradise II in New Brunswick. His baits never filled the top of a five gallon bucket. But again, every hunter had an opportunity at a bear. I asked him why his baits were so small. "I bait every day," he said, "and I want the bears to visit during the day so my hunters have a chance at them, so the bears become conditioned to get to the bait early or miss out."

This is the same philosophy for the use of a mechanical feeder that throws feed at a certain time each day. Instead of the whir of a feeder, though, the bears hear the guide's truck approach, him walk in and re-bait and leave. Then they become conditioned to come to the bait early or the food is gone.

Mechanical feeders like Moultrie's 30-gallon Pro Magnum Hanging can be programmed to throw a small amount of feed, and if a bear does not get to the feed first, other critters like deer or even squirrels can consume the manna from heaven. To avoid your mechanical feeder from getting ripped apart, hang it where bears cannot get to it. Other mechanical units like the Bear Baiter Buffet condition bears too. The door to the bait is on a timer and will only open during the time you set and it holds seven days worth of bait.

ADDITIONAL ATTRACTANTS

Regardless of size, most outfitters use the same type of bait each time the site is refreshed. However, when the heat is on and time is short, most will give their bait piles an additional shot of scent. Whether it is a honey burn, a product like the new Code Blue Bear Magnet, Bear Scent's Big Paw or anise from The Bear Bomb, the key is an attractive, potent scent that wafts farther through the woods than the normal bait.

Bear Magnet is an oil-based liquid with a strong odor I used this spring in New Brunswick. We only had a few bottles of the attractant and I had given them to some of the other hunters to try. Once they had their bears down, I took the remaining half bottle with me on the fourth night of the hunt. We dribbled the liquid along the trail as we walked in, and then poured it on top of the bait barrel.

An hour into the wait a bear came to the bait with its nose up high, drinking in the scent. After smelling the top of the barrel, the bear ate the bait, then stood on its hind legs and licked the Bear Magnet off the top.

Then the bear circled downwind of the trail we

had walked in on. When it disappeared through the woods I figured it was gone, but it came right back along the trail we had walked in on, nose to the ground. It made that circle twice looking for more of the potent attractant.

While it was not the biggest bear in the woods, I was on my next-to-last night on the stand and I needed to test Knight Rifles' new Rolling Block muzzleloader (KRB), so that bear came home with me. The KRB was loaded with 150-grains of powder and a 250-grain Ultimate Slam Series Polymer Tip Boat Tail, the bear never took a single step after the shot.

Another trick bear baiters use is to do a burn with a Sterno can inside a coffee can (to prevent any chance of a forest fire). Suspended over the top of the coffee can is a smaller tin can filled with something that gets fragrant when heated. Some hunters use bacon, but the most common substance is honey. Honey gives off a strong, sweet odor when heated and is a smell that makes bears with rumblies in their tumblies drool.

A warning about any type of burn, especially in pines where tinder is everywhere: be careful. Always clear the ground around your burn and make sure the honey is far enough away from the flame so it does not catch fire. When using a tin "loaf" pan set atop a coffee can, place a small amount of honey in the bottom of the pan, never fill it more than a quarter of the way, as too much honey results in it slopping over the sides when it boils.

Jack Coad pro staffs for a number of companies and is a longtime, dedicated bear hunter who likes to supplement his outfitters' baits, often with bacon burns. He uses a propane stove to get the bacon sizzling, and then takes his Sterno can and a six-inch long, four-inch diameter pipe to the woods. With the Sterno can lit he impales the pipe over the can and into the ground for a stable surface, and then places the frying pan on top of the pipe. This slowly cooks



There are many philosophies on how much and how often to bait. If what you are doing is working to get big bears, then keep it up. If it is not, it is time for a change or you may never get a big bruin in your sights.



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"Jeesh," Teel said. "I'm giving away all my secrets here. We also use grease from fast food joints, but if you do this you need to make sure it's pure grease with no chemicals. We pour it on a stump and when it rains bears dig and dig and dig to get it out of there."

HUMAN ODOR

Bears, like whitetail deer, are scent-oriented critters, and that means you need to pay attention to your human odor as well as the smells that attract bears.

"Oh, they know you're there," one grizzled old bear hunter told me. "Their noses are incredible and they almost always circle the bait before coming in. They're not really scent checking for you, though, they're making sure there's not a bigger bear already there. They just don't want to get whipped!"

That may be true, but a big, wise boar that catches your scent probably will not be coming to the bait. It is best to take all of the precautions possible to eliminate your odor, and keep it gone.

Traditional whitetail methods

the bacon and extends the life of your burn.

He also uses a concoction of molasses and blackberry or raspberry jam, spreading it on trees and leaving it in clumps near the bait.

"On the third or fourth night of hunting we usually have a seafood feast," Coad said. "In fact, throughout the year we save all of the crab legs, lobster shells and shrimp shells in the freezer. Mix this with clean grease and pour it around the site."

He also said that any shore lunch or fishing can add to the attractiveness of the bait pile. Fish heads and innards, plus the grease the fish were cooked in, are great additions to the bait. "The fresher the better," he said.

At Northridge when Teel is starting a new bait site he soaks a rag in an Anisette liqueur mixed with peanut oil to prevent it from evaporating. A little quick research on the Internet reveals that Anisette is an Italian anise-flavored liqueur that is sweeter than most anise-flavored liqueurs, which explains its bear-attracting nature. He soaks a rag in the liquid and hangs it in a tree near the bait site.

--- Tips To Trick Bears ---

ALTERNATE TREE STAND

If the outfitter allows, bring a climbing or quick attach hang-on stand like Summit Treestand's Copperhead Compact or Deer Deck with you, especially if you are hunting well into the season and others have hunted the same baits. Bears often look directly at established stands when they come to the bait.

Using the wind and the knowledge that bears often circle the bait prior to coming in, locate a spot downwind and off to one side where you can get a clear shot of the bait and a bear trail. If you can get higher in a tree than you can from the established stand, you will stand a better chance of eluding the bear's incredible nose.

CONSISTENCY

Consistency is important. "We drive up because they get used to hearing our vehicles," Teel said. "While you're getting in the stand we're masking your climbing sounds by banging on the barrels. We don't use any scent control so when they smell human, they smell us. We also make you stay in the stand until we come to get you, that way if there's a bear on the bait we can scare it off and not the hunter."

CALLING

Try calling in conjunction with your bait pile hunting. Use any type of prey-in-distress call from a cottontail to a fawn. Most experts suggest calling for longer periods of time than you would for coyotes, and keeping it going with no breaks for up to 30 minutes. A mid-range call like Knight & Hale's Ultimate Predator 1 or one from Jones Calls with a sound somewhere between a fawn and a snowshoe hare is a good call to try. Electronic calls can help the hunter save their breath. Simply hit the play button to call in bears.

- Lawrence Taylor

of getting and remaining scent free must be implemented when bear hunting. This means all of your hunting clothes need to be washed in an unscented laundry detergent, and hunters need to shower with an unscented soap prior to each hunt. I use Code Blue's Hair & Body Wash in the Fresh Earth version, which applies a full-body cover scent while eliminating human odor, and is one of the most effective and unique cover scent applications on the market.

Gear and backpacks taken to the stand also need to be treated with a scent elimination spray. Spray your bow and gear down with EliminX or other elimination spray before heading to the stand, and take that bottle with you.

The body is always producing scent, so reapply the scent elimination product periodically while on stand. Focus special attention on odor producing areas, such as the inside of your hat, under the arms, etc.

Rubber boots retain much less scent than other materials, but still should be sprayed with scent elimination spray prior to getting into the woods. Scent-inhibiting clothing from Scent-Lok or Arctic Shield also helps cut down your scent. Arctic Shield uses silver, a natural antimicrobial that is toxic to odor-causing bacteria.

Keep your hunting clothes in a scent free container and do not put them on until you reach your hunting destination and are preparing to walk to your stand. Try not to touch anything with your bare hands along the way. If you are a smoker, brush your teeth prior to hunting, and absolutely never smoke on stand. Even then, use a mouth spray to eliminate remaining smoke odors. If you must dip tobacco, keep a bottle with a lid to spit into.

Bears are mysterious creatures. It is amazing how you can sit in a stand



The author's personal scent control and scent attractant methods worked to help him get his bear.

staring at the bait, blink, and all of a sudden standing right in front of you is a big black critter. It is what keeps hunters coming back season after season. 🐾

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