

Fall Bear Primer

Although it feels like summer has finally just arrived here in Northwestern Ontario, and most of us may not be quite ready to get into the hunting mindset just yet, the fall bear hunt is just around the corner.

With the bear season opening early, in mid August, it seems to sneak up each year, as many folks aren't quite thinking about fall just yet, but for hunters who want to get out after bears, now's the time to get started. With a fairly generous season, there's not exactly a rush to get out and

hunt on the opener, but there's always some excitement that accompanies the opener of any season, and it's always a great chance to get afield.

Bear hunting can be a great hunting opportunity, both for seasoned hunters and maybe hunters newer to the sport, as it usually provides some excitement, action and hopefully shooting opportunities for hunters. It can also be a great intro to big game hunting. For archery hunters, it

offers a chance to both get out with your bow and comfortable with your gear, in hopes of harvesting a big game animal within pulse racing close range, out of stands or blinds if you're hunting over bait.

During the early season bears seem to be particularly active, and I find at this time of the year they are often out in daylight, and seem to stick to consistent patterns, making hunting them somewhat simpler. I find, at least in the areas I hunt, that as fall progresses, especially into October, many of the bears at my hunting sites have turned quite nocturnal, are out in daylight far less and seem to stick to no pattern whatsoever.

As far as bait for bears go, you can use a wide variety of things. Some hunters are able to get a line on bait from somewhere, be it old bread or pastries, but for those that don't have a connection with this type of bait, getting sufficient bait for bears isn't all that hard. I've commonly used dog food, buying the biggest cheapest bag I can find, and using small amounts of that each time I bait. As well, using corn or deer chow from Boles Feeds or the Farmers

co-op is another go to bait source for me, as it's relatively inexpensive bait that bears go nuts for. You can also collect your own bait at home, be it leftovers from dinner or old bread and fruit, anything like this is sure to be a desirable bear bait. Another good idea to get a good volume of bait for cheap is popping popcorn; serving as a great bear bait that will go a long way, is cheap to get, and also nice to carry into your bait. Whether I'm using bread, donuts, fruit, or popcorn, I always add a little something to my bait, usually a mixture of jello powder and vanilla or molasses, something to sweeten the bait up a bit and set some delicious odours in the air.

When it comes to setting up your bait, one of the most typical setups involves finding a 45 gallon drum or barrel. Once you get your hands on a barrel, cut a hole about 12" across in the side for the bears to access the bait. I usually cut a hole midway up the barrel, at a point you can fill the barrel with a decent amount of bait, and not so high that bears can't reach the bottom. I'll then cut a couple small holes in the back at the top, chain it to a tree (so it doesn't disappear), and fill it up. I like to jam a log or two into the hole in the barrel, to keep unwanted critters like raccoons or other creatures from getting at the bait before the bears do, helping it last a little longer. Another option for baiting, is finding or digging a hole in the ground, baiting in the hole, and then covering it with logs to again keep smaller animals out. This setup looks a bit more natural, and keeps the bait covered, but only until the bears unearth it, and then it's exposed and sure to be a magnet for skunks, raccoons, ravens and a variety of other wilderness creatures.

If you have a site you know there are bears around, you can setup your bait barrel and wait and see how long it takes bears to find it. If you are setting up a new bait or exploring new areas, one idea is to make

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several small baits, hanging or covering small amounts of bait in a variety of areas, seeing what gets hit by bears and setting up your main baiting site there.

As far as finding a location, there are plenty of options; with so much access to crown land it shouldn't be too hard to find a site to hunt. If you spend any time in the woods hunting or fishing or taking part in any outdoor activity, it's likely you're come across bears, and will have an idea where to start. You could explore some logging road systems, checking for bear sign: scat on the road, tree branches broken off on fruit or berry trees, or even seeing bears feeding along roadways or in cutovers. As the blueberries ripen up, bears are sure to be found cruising blueberry patches gorging themselves, and these can be great places to start.

Trail cameras are always helpful when baiting bears, both to help give you an idea of when your baits are getting hit, and what sort of bear sizes and numbers you are looking at. Depending on your bait setup and the creatures in the area, you may find your bait devoured in short time, getting gobbled up by raccoons, skunks, and ravens. These undesirable critters can make short work of unprotected bait piles, so trail cams are a good way to see what's going on, and ensuring you're hunting over a productive bait. I always setup my UWay cam on my bear baits, checking in often to keep track of what's going on at each, day and night, ultimately helping me plan my hunt, and hopefully making it another successful fall bear hunt.



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