

How Much Do Bears Really Eat? What's On a Bear's Menu Depends On Where A Bear Lives!

Bears are opportunists and will eat just about anything that is available. Grizzly bears are a little more particular in the type of food they eat and where they get it. Black bears are not as picky and will eat foods that grizzly bears won't eat such as chitons and sea stars found in the intertidal zone.

Having said that anything is possible. Observing bears for many years I have come to the conclusion that a bear will do what ever a bear chooses to do. And that includes what it wants to eat.

The diet of a bear is made up of approximately 85% vegetable matter with the last 15% obtained from some sort of protein. A bears diet depends on the area where it lives, the amount of food that is available and how much energy it uses to get that food. Some of the food that sources that bears will use are berries, roots and bulbs, insects and bugs and meat.



Berries And Fruit

Salmon Berry

Elder Berry

Huckleberry

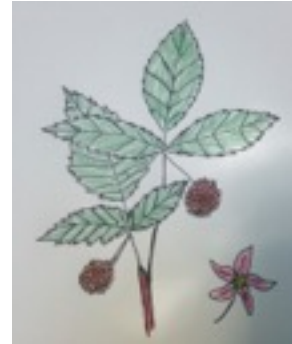
Thimbleberry

Soap Berry

Buffalo Berry

Blueberry

Crab Apples

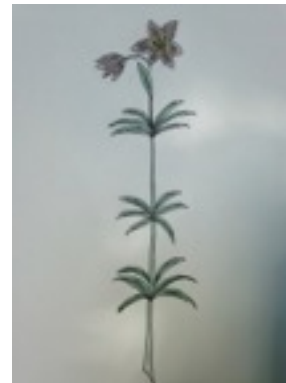


Roots and Bulbs

Rice Root

Skunk Cabbage

Cow Parsnip



Lyngby Sedge

Last but not least is the Lyngby sedge, and is by far the most important food source of a grizzly bear that lives on the coast. This plant is found in the tidal marshes and estuaries and is one of the first foods available in the spring when bears come down from the mountains after emerging from their dens. This plant contains about 25% of crude protein that is essential to the nutrition of a coastal grizzly bear.



Survival Secrets of Grizzly Bears and Black Bears!

Fact Sheet #3

Daryl Dancer
Nature, Art, Grizzly Bears

Protein

Insects and Bugs

Salmon

Deer

Elk

Caribou

Buffalo

Mountain Goats



Intertidal Zone

Blue Mussels

Marine Isopods

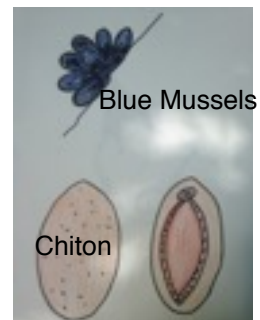
Blenny Eels

Gunnels

Chiton

Sea Stars

Clams



Why Do Bears Eat So Much!

Bears need to eat so much because they have very inefficient digestive systems and with the shortest intestinal tract of any mammal. To absorb enough nutrients, bears need to eat large amounts of food. What goes into a bear's mouth comes out pretty much looking the same as it went in. It is very easy to tell exactly what a bear is eating by examining its scat. That is how researchers are able to determine how many berries a bear can eat in one day.

On one of the tracking tours I have taken my guests on we found a bear's scat that had three food groups in it, sedge, berries and salmon. I have also found a pile of scat that contained whole crab apples with skin and stems intact.

When I realized that bear scat in the spring is made up of primarily sedge, I thought I would gather some up and make some paper using the scat. Here is an example of the paper with bear scat and previously used paper. I love to be inspired by nature in my artwork.



How Much Do Bears Eat?

Bears are constantly eating and need to play catch up for not eating for at least five months. By the time bears emerge from their dens in the spring they have lost almost 40% of their body mass.

As soon as a bear emerges it is preparing for the next winters sleep. The most important food source for a grizzly bear is Lyngby Sedge. It has at least 25% vegetable protein and is available most of the season.

Grizzly bears will eat about 70 kilos or 154 pounds of sedge each day to get the nutrients that it needs.

How many berries can a bear eat?

I love asking guests How many berries, do you think a bear might eat in one day? The answer just might be a surprise!! Can you guess how many berries a bear can eat in one day? Actually it is much higher than that!

Here's a hint, bears have a very inefficient digestive systems, which means whatever they eat comes out the other end pretty much the same as it went in. So to get enough nutrients bears need to eat and eat and then eat some more.

Researchers, who have followed bears during the berry season, found that depending on the berries being eaten, a bear can consume over 70,000 to 200,000 berries a day. Wow, can you imagine eating that much of any one food everyday?

