

Environmental Enrichment for Bears

Bears are very active in the wild, often spending most of their day looking for food. Enrichment helps create environments for captive bears that encourage them to be active and offer mental stimulation.



WHY BEARS NEED ENRICHMENT

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Designing bear enclosures to support basic behavioral needs like digging, swimming, climbing, and denning is important. But this is not always enough to keep captive bears busy. They do best when they also have opportunities that encourage them to problem-solve, search for food items, and explore their enclosure.

PRACTICAL TIP



Varying what kinds of enrichment you offer and when you offer it helps keep the bear's interest. Creating a calendar with a variety of enrichment opportunities scheduled each day is one way to achieve this goal.

IDEAS FOR BEAR ENRICHMENT

- **Food enrichment**
 - Favorite healthy foods frozen into blocks of ice
 - Honey or other food items hidden in logs or puzzles
 - Spreading food items throughout the enclosure and on surfaces that require standing and stretching to access
- Applying different scents (e.g., perfume, spices, other animal odors) to surfaces in the enclosure
- Rewards-based training
- Toys such as large plastic barrels, sturdy bear-proof balls, used paper feed sacks filled with hay or food items, traffic cones, or food hidden in cardboard boxes
- Logs
- Occasionally rearranging or adding new furnishings
- Housing compatible bears together

Offering your bears a variety of enrichment options, both in how you feed them and support their behavioral needs, helps keep them active and healthy.



DID YOU KNOW?

A stereotypic behavior is one that is done repeatedly without any obvious goal or purpose. These behaviors may indicate that your bears do not have enough mental or physical stimulation to keep them busy throughout the day or the behavior could be due to a painful condition.



ANIMAL CARE AID

This Animal Care Aid is part of a series developed to provide information about bear health and care. Refer to the other topics covered in the series for more information on bear care.

Questions? Email us at CenterforAnimalWelfare@usda.gov

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