

BEAR BAG HANGING TECHNIQUES



The black bear population in Florida is on the rise and with it an increase in bear/human contact. This summer has seen several potentially dangerous situations, particularly in the Ocala National Forest and all three national forests have issued regulations requiring food to be hung or stored in a bear-proof container. While damage thus far has been limited to personal property, backpackers can help prevent bears from becoming habituated to humans by properly hanging their food and other bear attractants. Not only will it increase your chances of finishing your hike without a trip off the trail to a grocery but it will also increase the bears' chances of survival. Bear bagging will also keep your stuff safe from other forest critters such as raccoons, squirrels, and hungry hunting dogs.

While the instructions below refer to your "food" bag, note that you should include in that bag anything with a strong odor that might attract bears. This includes toothpaste, soap, shampoo, etc.

Proper food hanging for black bears requires that your food bag hang a minimum of 10' off the ground and a minimum of 4 feet out from tree trunks and major limbs. So start your search for the perfect bear bag spot by looking for a tree with a limb 15-20 feet off the ground that is strong enough to hold the weight of your food bag but light enough it won't support the weight of a bear cub. Also make sure that there are no adjacent trees or limbs that animals could use to get close to your hanging bag.

There are at least 4 methods of hanging a bear bag and many variations on these 4 can be found on the internet. Most tell you to use a rock, but since rocks are hard to come by in Florida my instructions substitute a small stuff sack that you can fill with a handful or two of sand on site. None of these methods require a lot of extra equipment or added weight although it can take practice to perfect a technique that works for you.

All of these methods require:

- A water-proof bag for your food — sil-nylon or coated nylon is best. Look for the kind that has a strap on the bottom and a drawstring on the top. You will actually hang the bag by the strap so the opening is on the bottom. This helps tremendously if it rains during the night.
- At least 50 feet of line — Spectra/Dyneema works great because it doesn't tangle and is very abrasion-resistant, but any smooth line will work. I like 1/4-inch braided nylon cord. Rough line, like the cheap and frequently recommended parachute cord, may get caught in tree bark making it difficult to retrieve.
- A small stuff sack to hold a handful of sand. I use my tent stake bag.
- 1 or 2 mini-carabiners — the type you would buy for a keychain will do.



Traditional Method

This is probably the most common method used.

- Tie a small loop in one end of your throw line.
- Fill the small stuff sack with a handful of sand.
- Attach throw line loop to sand sack drawstring with the carabiner.
- Using an underhand pitch, throw sand sack over a limb about 15 feet high. It may help if you stand on the loose end of the line so it doesn't get away from you.
- Remove sand sack from carabiner and attach carabiner to the bottom strap of your food bag.
- Pull on loose end of line until food bag is at the proper height.
- Tie off loose end of line to a different tree trunk or (strong) branch, as high as you can reach.

Counter-Balance Method

This is also pretty common, especially for groups when there are several food bags.

- Divide your food into two bags, roughly equal in weight.
- Tie a small loop in one end of your throw line.
- Fill the small stuff sack with a handful of sand.
- Attach throw line loop to sand sack drawstring with the carabiner.
- Using an underhand pitch, throw sand sack over a limb about 15 feet high. It may help if you stand on the loose end of the line so it doesn't get away from you.
- Remove sand sack from carabiner and attach carabiner to the bottom strap of food bag 1.
- Pull food bag up to just under the limb.
- Reach up as high as you can on the loose end of the line and tie a second loop.
- Attach food bag 2 to the second loop with another carabiner.
- Using a hiking pole or branch, push food bag 2 up until the two bags are even on either side of limb.
- Tie off the loose end to a different tree trunk or (strong) branch, as high as you can reach.

Two-Line Method

This technique works well for large, heavy bags like a group bag or if you decide to hang entire packs, but it does require two lines and 2 trees at least 20 feet apart with limbs at approximately the same height. It can also be done with one 100 ft line, attaching the food bag in the middle.

- Tie a small loop in one end of both throw lines.
- Fill the small stuff sack with a handful of sand.
- Attach throw line loop to sand sack drawstring with the carabiner.
- Using an underhand pitch, throw sand sack over a limb about 25 feet high.
- Remove sand sack and repeat with second line on second tree.
- You should now have 2 loops with carabiners on the ground between the trees and two loose ends hanging near the tree trunks.
- Attach bottom strap of food bag to the two loops with two carabiners.
- Pull on loose ends of line until food bag is at the proper height, suspended equally between the two trees.
- Tie off the loose ends to a different tree trunk or (strong) branch, as high as you can reach.

PCT Method

This technique is my favorite because it's easy and if the bear pulls on the line, they won't get the food. However, it does require a good eye for distance so you may have to practice a bit.

- Tie a small loop in one end of your throw line.
- Fill the small stuff sack with a handful of sand.
- Attach throw line loop to sand sack drawstring with the carabiner.
- Using an underhand pitch, throw sand sack over a limb about 15 feet high.
- Remove sand sack from carabiner and attach carabiner to the bottom strap of your food bag.
- Clip the loose end of the line through the carabiner so it runs freely.
- Pull on loose end of line until food bag is just below the limb.
- Reach up as high as you can on the loose end of the line and tie a clove hitch around a small, stout twig.
- Let go of the line, and gravity will pull the food bag down until the twig hits the carabiner.
- The loose end of the line can be tied off out of the way or left to hang, as high as you can reach.