

Ontario



BEAR BUFFET

A PRO'S GUIDE TO BAITING PG. 36

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# LOW-IMPACT BEAR BAIT

BRING BIG BEARS TO YOUR SITE WITH THIS MINIMALIST APPROACH

TOM ARMSTRONG

While it may seem simple, there's a lot of strategy to baiting bears, and how you go about it can greatly affect your hunting success. It's relatively easy to put out feed to draw bears in, but getting the big ones to come in during hunting hours takes a bit more care.

This method increases daylight bear activity and allows you to put out a significant amount of bait so that you can stay away longer. The result is that bears are more at ease

around the area, as you aren't making as many trips to the bait site as with traditional baiting. This means less time, effort, and fuel cost. You can bait every week or two.

I learned this method from Andrew Romu of Boundary Waters Guide Service ([www.bwgs.ca](http://www.bwgs.ca)), who runs a bear outfitting operation. He picked it up years back from a friend in Manitoba. (Check out my spring bear hunt with Romu on page 58.)



Set up your barrels between two trees, about 10 feet apart.

## THE SET-UP

Cut 6 x 8 inch holes about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way up each barrel. These small openings allow bears to take corn out to eat, but they can't gorge themselves, or take bait away from the site. Even with this minimal access, bears are able to clean the barrel out, reaching the deepest corners of the barrel.

If possible, weld the barrels together end-to-end to maximize the amount of bait offered.

Use steel barrels. Bears can tear up the holes in plastic barrels in no time, especially with the leverage they get as the barrels are solidly affixed to logs.

### Tools/equipment

- Spikes/lag bolts
- Steel barrels (ideally two welded together)
- Chainsaw (and safety gear)
- Chain (and screws/bolts to attach it)

### The set-up

Suspend two logs horizontally a foot or more off the ground, between two trees. The trees should be spaced far enough apart to accommodate two barrels. Set two 45-gallon drums on the logs and secure them with chain.

Wrap the chain around the barrels and the logs. Secure it to the barrel with bolts.

Set the barrels on 10-inch diameter logs secured to the trees with large spikes, lag bolts and/or heavy-duty straps.





# BAIT

Corn is ideal for this set-up. It is relatively inexpensive, easy to obtain and handle, and bears love it. Several hundred pounds of corn can be loaded into two barrels, and topped off with molasses or old grease. While baits like donuts and bread can be effective, they can be hard to consistently get in large quantities. For price and simplicity, corn is an ideal high-volume bait. It works very well with this system, and the bears will lick the barrels clean.

## The regs

**During the spring and fall black bear seasons, bait may not be placed for the purpose of bear hunting:**

- within 500 metres of a dwelling, unless written permission is obtained from the owner of the dwelling.
- within 500 metres of a public building.
- within 200 metres of a right of way for public vehicular traffic or a sign-posted/marked recreational trail that is established and maintained by an organization for the general public.



## Trail cams

Trail cams are key, allowing you to see the number and quality of bears, the schedules they keep, and letting you know if there are sows with cubs. To further limit intrusion, cellular trail cams can allow you to completely stay out of the area, and remotely keep tabs on the bears and get an idea when bait is running low.

If you have a location already, this job can even be tackled in winter or early spring for the upcoming season. With a little bit of effort and preparation, this can be a great, long-term bear-baiting method to increase your success. ●





# Boundary Waters Guide Service

## A BOW HUNT FOR SPRING BEAR

### COST

Six-day hunt with lodging, meals, and transportation to baited stand \$2,250.

### GETTING THERE

Boundary Waters Guide Service is one hour southwest of Thunder Bay via Hwy. 61 and Hwy 593.

“That ought to work,” said Andrew Romu as we stepped back to admire the impromptu brush blind. We’d made a last-minute adjustment to our hunting plans and switched to a new bait site that had seen a serious increase in bear activity. No tree stand had been installed yet, so we decided to hunt from the ground, and had built a rough shelter 18 yards from the bait.

I was bowhunting with friend and bear outfitter, Romu, of Boundary Waters Guide Service on the Victoria Day weekend. Romu is a Bear Management Area operator south of Thunder Bay, just north of the Minnesota border, who offers guided hunts for bear and wolf, and fishing trips. He operates out of a classic log cabin that was built by his father in 1974 from white pine he harvested and sawed. This was once the family homestead, and is now the hunt camp, offering lodging and excellent home-cooked fare for up to seven guests. With some

modern additions and amenities, it’s a great setting for a hunt.

### Back on stand

On our first afternoon, we headed out to check baits and found good bear activity at every stand. The snow had recently disappeared and bears were hungry, showing up in daylight at most sites. Romu says activity traditionally ramps up in early June, so for late May things looked promising.

Back at camp, we fired up the sauna and got cleaned up and scent-free for the evening hunt. We took the truck as far as we could, unloaded the ATV for the rough stuff, and walked in the last few hundred yards.

The bait site was tucked into a planted pine plantation and the trail camera revealed that an impressively large bear had frequented it. He’d just recently shown up, and wasn’t a regular daylight visitor, but it was worth a shot. We spent the evening in the plantation, and although we didn’t see a bear, it was great to be in the stand with bow in hand.

The next morning, we decided to try another





location that offered a tree stand tucked within a mature cedar forest. The knotted roots of the old cedars ran across a thick carpet of moss, with little undergrowth to obscure our view. It was a great-looking spot backed up by trail camera pics of bear activity. We sat until the bugs chased us out of the stand.

### Makeshift ground blind

Later that morning, with temperatures warming and the sun shining, we ventured out again to check baits and pick a different location for our evening hunt. This time, we settled on the new site that had been hammered by multiple bears, but didn't have a tree stand. Wanting to limit disturbance at the site, we set to work cutting small spruce and pine boughs, and created a three-sided brush wall with a small shooting hole. Satisfied that it would conceal us from a bear, we headed back to the cabin to fill our bellies and prepare for the hunt.

By mid-afternoon we were creeping back into our makeshift blind. It was immediately apparent that something had recently visited, and sure enough, a quick check of the trail camera revealed a bear had just been at the bait, likely about the same time we'd begun our walk in.



See your digital edition for a video.



With optimism high, we settled in behind our wall of brush.

### Short wait

"Bear," Romu whispered as he looked over my shoulder at the trail beyond our set-up. But as quickly as it appeared it vanished, melting back into the boreal forest. I didn't move, hoping it would return. And it wasn't long before I could see a black shape approaching through the underbrush. The bear cautiously made its way out and started feeding, laying down under the bait barrel, forcing me to settle my nerves and wait for a shot. For the next 15 minutes, we watched the bruin feed and mill about, never presenting a shot. He was standing, laying, or moving, and never stood broadside. It was a great looking bear, with a sleek and silky jet-black coat.

When the bear climbed up onto the logs that were holding the bait barrels, I drew, and waited at full draw for over a minute. Eventually, he stood broadside and I released the arrow. It hit home and he barrelled off into the timber, shaking the trees as he collapsed with a crash in view of the stand. After giving him some time, we emerged from the blind to claim my spring bear.

With plenty of daylight left, we loaded it onto the ATV and headed back to camp, where we dressed and skinned the animal before starting dinner and heating up the sauna.

It was my first time harvesting a spring bear, and after a long cold winter it sure felt great to get back in the stand. ●

### ACCOMMODATIONS

Drive-to main lodge with propane fridge, stove, hot water, woodstove, and sauna.

### CONTACT

Boundary Waters Guide Service  
Andrew Romu, 844-935-3080, info@bwgs.ca,  
www.bwgs.ca

### In case you missed it

Check out more of Andrew Romu's tips on bear baiting, on page 36.

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