## Hanging A Bear Bag—The PCT Method

**by Derek**

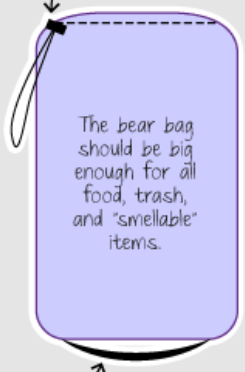
There are multiple techniques to hang a bear bag, but when I first learned the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) method, it's been my favorite option. The PCT method is actually pretty simple to set up, but is very effective to deter animals trying to get at your food. The PCT method uses a single rope that is tossed over a high, sturdy branch and is then clipped to the bear bag with a mini carabiner. The standing end of the rope is clipped back through the carabiner and then the bear bag is hoisted all the way to the top of the branch. At this point, use a small stick (or even a spare stake) to use as a toggle. Tie a clove hitch with the rope around the toggle as high as you can reach up on the rope. When you slowly release the cord, the bear bag will stop at the mid point when the toggle connects with the carabiner.

The PCT method uses less cordage, which can help reduce weight and bulk in your backpack. I prefer using a slippery line that will glide more easily over the trees and prevent cutting into the bark. I highly recommend the Spectra kit from AntiGravityGear.com, which comes with a lightweight throw bag that doubles as a storage bag for the line. I use a lightweight cuben fiber or silnylon stuff sack as my food bag, which can then double as the bear bag. The cuben or sil fabric is waterproof, which helps to protect my gear when hanging in the rain overnight. All told, this kit can weigh as little as 2 oz (57 g) or less.

# HANGING A BEAR BAG—THE "PCT" METHOD



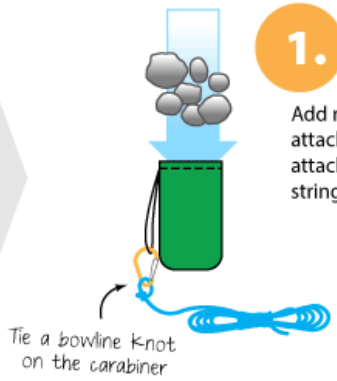
If hung "upside down" be sure to tie a slippery overhand knot to prevent the cord lock from loosening



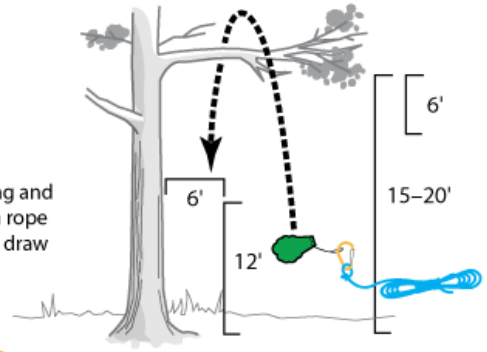

Bags with a webbing strap or loop are ideal

**EQUIPMENT**

- Bear Bag
- 40 ft (12 m) Rope
- Throw/Rope Bag
- Mini Carabiner
- Small twig



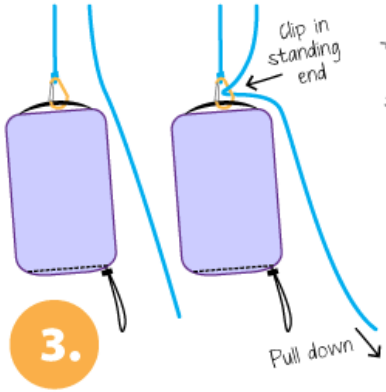

**1.** Add rocks to throw bag and attach carabiner (with rope attached) to the bag's draw string to secure.



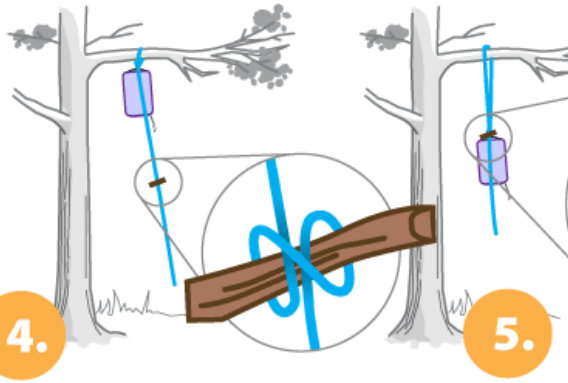

**2.** Toss the throw bag over a sturdy branch that is 15–20 ft (4.5–6 m) above the ground.

**NOTE**: When properly hung, the bear bag should hang at least 12 ft (4 m) above the ground and 6 ft (~2 m) down from the branch and away from the tree trunk.

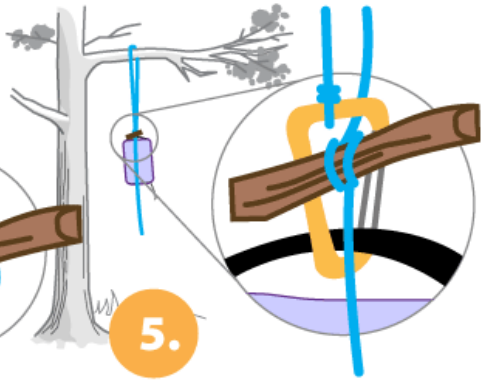
(See http://lnt.org/blog/hanging-bear-bag)




**3.** Unclip throw bag from carabiner. Clip carabiner to bear bag. Feed loose end of the rope through carabiner and pull loose end to raise the bear bag to the top of the tree branch.

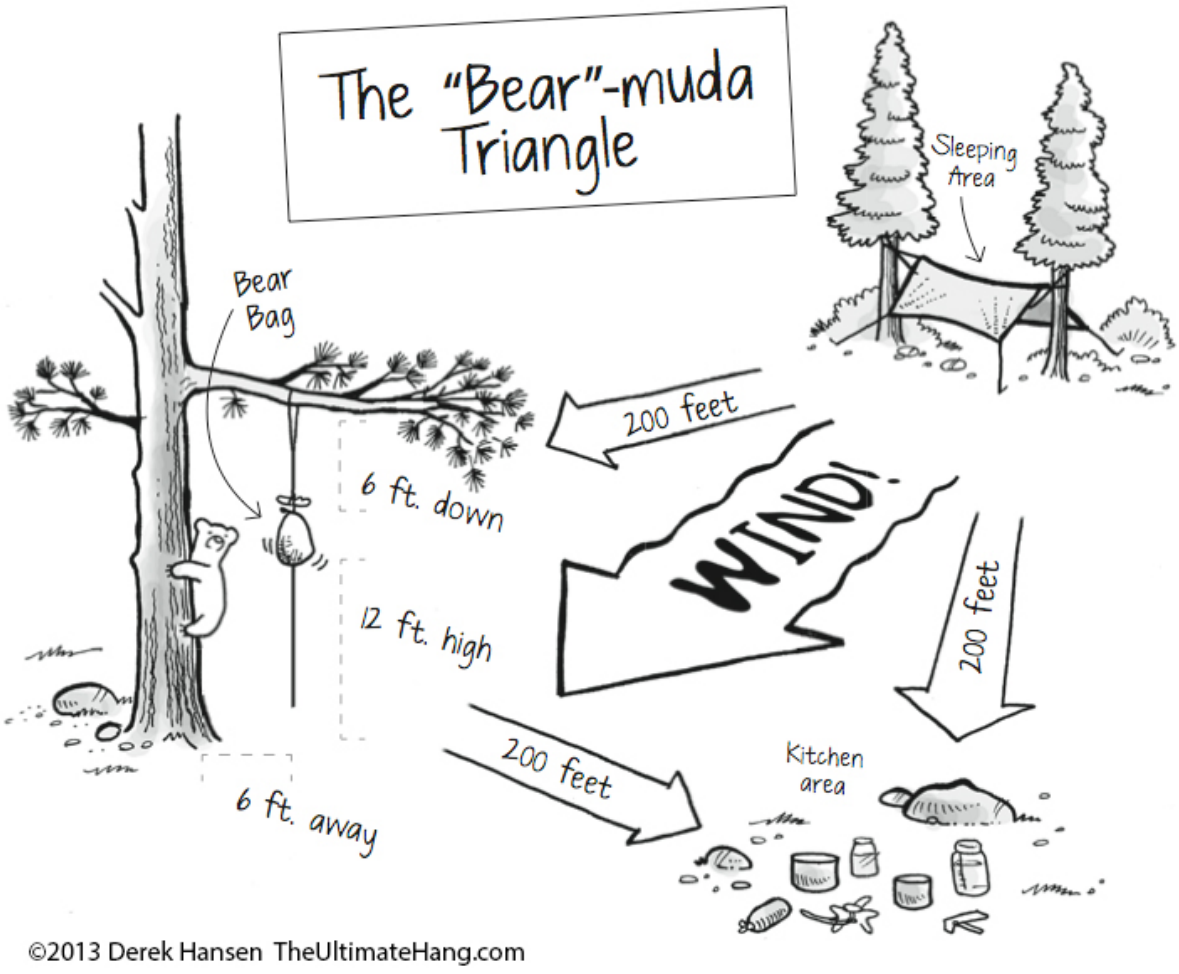



**4.** Reach as high as you can and tie a clove hitch around the twig on the loose end of the rope, creating a toggle.



**5.** Release the loose end of the rope. The bear bag will stop at the toggle.

**Another key element to hanging a bear bag is location. You should hang the bag well away (200 ft/60 m) and downwind of your sleeping area. Your kitchen** area should also be 200 ft (60 m) from your sleeping site. Everything that smells (e.g., food, garbage, hygiene items, food-soiled clothing, etc.) should be placed in the bear bag for safety. Clean stoves, pots, water bottles, and utensils can be safely left in the kitchen area. For more information on bear bagging and respecting wildlife, please visit the Leave No Trace Center.




## Bear Bag Hanging

### The PCT Method

A system that combines the "bear" essentials for hanging a bear bag using the PCT method: here, an ultralight 600 ci food storage sack made with noseeum mesh and sub-one-ounce silicone coated nylon (lined with an odor proof zip closure bag) and a rock sack of the same material, combined with 40 feet of Spectra rope, and a micro wiregate carabiner can weigh as little as three ounces.

(Photo: Bozeman Mountain Works UrsaLite Bear Bag Hanging System)

Affectionately known by the lightweight hiking underground as the "PCT Method" (presumably because it was first used by long distance hikers on the Pacific Crest Trail), a bear bag hanging method exists that is lighter, requires less rope, offers the benefits of counterbalancing, is easier to set up, and offers simple and quick hanging and retrieval of your food.

You can make your own system quite easily by assembling the following components:

- Food storage bag
- 40 feet of hanging rope
- Keychain carabiner
- Small stuff sack for a rock ("rock sack")
- Pencil-sized twig about 4-6 inches long.

Using 1.4-oz silicone-coated nylon waterproof stuff sacks for the rock sack and food storage bag, 1/8" parachute cord for the hanging rope, and a two-inch carabiner from Wal-Mart, you can achieve a system weight of about five or six ounces.

The system is used as follows:

1. Tie one end of the rope to the drawcord of the rock sack.
2. Tie a loop (e.g., bowline) into the other end of the rope and clip the carabiner through it.
3. Insert a rock into the rock sack, cinch it closed, and throw it over a branch that is 15-20 feet high.
4. Remove the rock from the rock sack.
5. Attach the food sack drawcord to the carabiner.
6. Clip the rock sack end of the rope through the carabiner so that it can run freely.
7. Pull the rock sack end of the rope until the food bag is at the height of the branch.
8. Take the twig and reach as far as possible up the rock sack end of the rope (for the average man, this is about six feet) and tie a clove hitch around the twig.
9. Let the rock sack end of the rope go, until the twig catches on the carabiner and keeps the food sack in place, at least 10 feet above the ground.

This system leaves extra rope hanging freely below the food bag, and unlike conventional hanging systems where the spare end of the rope is tied to a tree trunk, eliminates the possibility of an animal untying or chewing the rope in efforts to bring the food bag down.

In addition, the PCT Method requires less skill, and thus, is faster to deploy than the counterbalance method. Finally, the PCT Method requires a system of equipment that is lighter than the counterbalance method because it uses less rope and only one food storage sack.

This three-panel image set (using different colored cords for clarity only) shows the process of hanging a food bag using the PCT Method: (**LEFT**) The rope is thrown over a tree limb at least 15 feet high (with the aid of the rock sack, which in this panel, is tied to the bottom of the black

cord). The food sack drawstring is then clipped into the carabiner, and the food raised by pulling on the rock sack end of the cord until the carabiner reaches the top of the limb. (**CENTER**) The hiker reaches as high up the rock sack end of the rope and ties a two-loop clove hitch (see Steps 1-3 here) and inserts a pencil-sized twig into the loops, then tightens the knot. (**RIGHT**) The rock sack end of the rope (now containing a twig tied in as high up as possible) is then slackened, allowing the twig to come to rest against the carabiner, stopping the sack high enough above the ground for a good bear hang (at least 10 feet). To retrieve your food, simply pull the rock sack end of the cord and reverse the process.

A bear bag system using the PCT Method can be easily assembled from readily available components: existing stuff sacks, rope, and a keychain carabiner. Using 1.4-oz silicone coated nylon stuff sacks (e.g., 600 cubic inches for the food storage bag and 50 cubic inches for the rock sack), combined with thirty five feet of cord such as paracord (3/16 inch minimum so as not to dig into the branches of softwood trees such as pine, spruce, or fir), and a typical keychain carabiner, the system can weigh as little as five ounces. Adding or subtracting weight from this system can be accomplished simply by altering the cost (which buys you higher strength materials for less weight) and durability of the materials used.