

## Protect your trees NOW from deer damage!

When you look outside this fall, don't be surprised if you see more deer activity in your back yard. Deer mating season in Ohio occurs from roughly **early September through November**. During this time, male deer clean their antlers and mark their territory by rubbing against trees, a process known as deer rut. The buck rubs his antlers on trees to remove the velvet that covers them (although the velvet doesn't cause any discomfort), as well as to attract females and mark their territory, essentially telling other deer to "stay away." In addition to rubbing, bucks may also batter or thrash their antlers against trees.

As you might imagine, this behavior can be detrimental to your trees. As the buck rubs his antlers, much of the bark on your tree will be shredded and removed from about one to six feet above the ground.

A tree that has been damaged around its entire circumference is known as "girdled", meaning the underlying wood is now exposed to the elements. When a smaller tree is girdled, the prognosis is generally poor.

Perhaps you noticed evidence of this tree damage in your yard last year but were unsure of the cause. If you did, you'll want to take steps this year to protect your tree from additional damage. Once a buck has rubbed a particular tree, he will usually return to the same tree again and again.

## HOW TO PROTECT YOUR TREES

Fortunately, there are some actions that you can take, besides installing an eight foot tall fence, that will protect your tree without causing any harm to the deer.

### 1. TREE GUARDS

Tree guards are placed directly around the trunk of young trees to protect them from deer antler damage. Tree guards are typically made of mesh plastic netting, plastic tubing, or special piping that wraps around the tree while also allowing it to grow naturally



The first photo shows the installation of a fence around the tree(s) you want to protect. A good rule of thumb is to have the fence 3-4 feet away from the trunk of the tree. You can also elevate the fence several inches to make it easy to maintain the grass for aesthetic purposes. Also, making the mulch bed the same distance away from the trunk will help make maintenance of the area much easier for you.

The second photo shows how you might install a triangle of posts around the trunk of the tree. Male deer will typically not rub their antlers on metal, but if they do the rubbing will be on the post and not your tree. Both of these techniques are only needed from September 1st to January 31st and can be removed the remainder of the year.

The third technique is to use rigid tree bark protectors (last photo) which you can purchase at any home improvement store or by doing a quick search online. Usually using protectors rather than wrappings will provide better results. Use these from where the trunk of the tree meets the ground up about 4 feet. These protect the tree if the deer would attempt to rub on it. In addition, this technique offers trees (especially young trees) protection from squirrels, rabbits, and rodents from chewing the bark which can kill the tree as well. If you use this method, it is recommended to keep the tubing on from at least October 1st to April 1st. However, these can be left on year round if you wish. Once the tree begins to outgrow the tree bark protector, usually when the tree reaches 4 inches in diameter, make sure to remove it so that it doesn't harm the tree as the tree grows. By that time the tree will be large enough that most deer will avoid rubbing it.

## 2. DEER REPELLENT

Most deer repellents work by exuding a **taste or smell that's unpleasant to the deer**, including garlic, rotten eggs, sewage, and predator urine. The problem is that some scent-based repellents are also unpleasant for us humans, so look for one that isn't too offensive.

Keep in mind that this is only a temporary fix and will need to be applied regularly, especially after it rains. You should also apply a mix of different repellents each time you spray; deer can habituate to the scent of a repellent over time and it will lose its effectiveness.

Our own gardener extraordinaire, Richard Jackson, has had some success using Safer Deer Off Deer repellent from Ace Hardware. I picked up a 6 pack for \$19.99 and am going to give it a try this year in addition to using some of the tree guards. Other brands of repellent include DeerScram, Repels All, Liquid Fence and Milorganite.

A homemade remedy is to use cut pieces of **strongly-scented deodorant soap** (some gardeners swear by Irish Spring soap). Put the soap in a mesh bag and hang it from your tree's branches or attach it to a stake. Just don't hang it where the soap can drip down the trunk; that attracts rodents who will eat through the bark. Deer will happily nibble plants within 3 feet of smelly soap so you may have to use a lot of soap!

We've also heard of people using **human hair**; apparently it triggers an alert reaction in deer and they tend to stay away. However, hair loses its scent within a few weeks so you'll have to replace it monthly. And in more urban areas where deer are used to people, it likely won't be as effective.

## IN SUMMARY

So this fall be on the lookout for amorous bucks “attacking” your trees! If you notice any damage, or see a lot of deer on your property, take steps now to protect your trees.

Article sourced from online tips by Natorp’s and From Independent Tree, Newbury, Ohio