

Southwest Tree Injury is a common problem for young, soft-barked trees in our area. If you planted maples, weeping willows, fruit trees or other soft-barked trees this fall, there is a simple, effective way to protect them.



Southwest Tree Injury is the name for winter damage to young soft-barked trees planted where they have southwestern sun exposure. During the day, as the sun warms the tree, cells de-acclimate and sap starts to move expanding the bark. At night when the temperature drops back to freezing the cells burst causing the bark to crack. This process repeats all winter long causing the bark to break down on the southwest side of the tree. The open wound is a great opening for disease and insects to damage young trees. You can see examples of Southwest Tree Injury on young trees planted in parking lots all around our area.

Tree wrap is an easy, inexpensive way to minimize Southwest Tree Injury by keeping direct sunlight off the bark of your young tree. It is readily available at your local nursery or home and garden store. Apply tree wrap before the first frost, which usually happens in October.

Tree wrap is available in paper or plastic. Paper wrap will usually last just one season, but plastic wraps are re-usable. Wrap the trunk of your new tree starting

at the base and continue all the way up to the first branch. If you use paper wrapping, overlap each round a little to create a shingle effect to shed rain and snow. Wrap just tightly enough to keep the wrap in place but not so tight that it will constrict the tree. Use masking tape at the top to hold it in place. If you use a plastic wrap, be sure it fits loosely and has holes or slits in the plastic to allow for good air movement as trapped moisture can promote disease. Be sure to check the wrapping periodically for insects overwintering there. Plan to wrap young trees for the first two or three growing seasons.

Remove all tree wrappings at the end of winter before new growth begins and the tree starts to expand. **Leaving the wrapping in place while it is actively growing will constrict the trunk and damage the tree.**

Mulch will help, too. Put a three-inch layer around the base of the tree but not right up against the bark to help keep the roots warm and retain soil moisture. The roots of young trees are still growing even though it is winter. They need about an inch of water each week, so be prepared to water if we do not get enough precipitation.

For a video on “*Protecting Young Trees from Winter Damage*,” visit the Tulsa County Master Gardeners website mg@tulsamastergardeners.org. Click on “*Lawn and Garden Help*” and choose the “*Trees and Shrubs*” tab. Protect your young trees (and your investment) this winter and enjoy them for many years to come.

You can get answers to all your gardening questions by calling the Tulsa Master Gardeners Help Line at 918-746-3701, dropping by our Diagnostic Center at 4116 East 15th Street, or by emailing us at mg@tulsamastergardeners.org.

Sources:

[HLA-6414 Planting Trees and Shrubs](#) - OSU Extension Service

[E-1034 Master Gardener's Handbook](#) - OSU Extension Service

“Helping Trees Survive the Winter” Tulsa World, December 6, 2020