

Deer Fencing for Individual Trees

Deer, by rubbing their antlers and eating tree bark, are the second most common cause of tree loss in South Dakota, exceeded only by lack of watering. The only guaranteed way to prevent deer-caused tree loss is by erecting a physical barrier so the deer cannot reach the trees. Deer can easily jump 7' and taller fences but need an unobstructed landing area to do so. The fence described below will be just over 5' tall, uses the least amount of material to protect a single tree, and is very effective at preventing deer damage.

Before the fence is constructed, trim off any water shoots or suckers coming either from the base or immediately around the trunk. Weed and lay down at least a 2" thick layer of mulch around the tree leaving a 2" wide mulch-free area immediately surrounding the trunk. If rabbits are likely to cause damage to the tree by chewing the bark, it is easier to install a white, corrugated protection sleeve around the trunk before the fence is completed.

Materials required for this fence are two 6' studded metal fence T posts, a roll of 4' wide welded galvanized wire fencing with 2" x 4" mesh, and a small amount of 14 or 16 gauge wire. Each post should be placed on opposite sides of the tree and driven into the ground deep enough to secure the fencing material. The posts should be installed at least 2' from the trunk but should be moved further out until the branches do not come in contact with the fence.

The fencing roll is sometimes difficult to work with as it always wants to roll up on itself. For this project, this "re-rolling" is actually useful and helps form the fence. Starting at one post and unroll the fencing material around the tree completing a circle and cut the length off the roll. If the posts are exactly 2' from the trunk the

length of the cut piece should be around 13'; if the posts are 3' from the trunk the fencing material should be close to 20'. It is important to start and stop the circle at a post so both ends can be secured to the post and themselves. If there is not a post where the two ends meet, the two ends will eventually curl inward and will not be as effective tree protection. Do not tie the fence ends onto the posts until after the next step.

Grab the fencing material and lift it up 1-1/2' so the top of the fence sits 5-1/2' off the ground. Usually this is a 2-person job. If the top of the fencing material is above the tops of the posts but still stays rigid and doesn't flop around, that's OK. Now tie the fencing material to both posts and the fence is complete! The spacing between the opposing sides plus the tree itself doesn't give enough of a landing zone for deer to jump over the fence and the gap at the bottom is too short for them to crawl under. The gap under the fence also allows mower and weed trimmer access if needed.

