

Tree Protection – Tree Tubes and Bud Capping

Using tree tubes is one option for seedling protection. Tree tubes are plastic tubes that are placed over deciduous seedlings for protection. The tubes are staked into place with wooden stakes instead of digging the tube into the ground so the ground directly surrounding the seedling will not be disturbed. The main purpose of the tree tubes is protection from deer browsing. The tubes protect the trees until they are tall enough to be out of reach of the deer. Because the tubes are fairly narrow, the trees are forced to grow straight and not branch out close to the ground. Tree tubes can also be used in yards to help ensure that trees are not damaged by mowers. The tree tubes are designed to let in light so the trees can photosynthesize while inside the tube. One of the downsides of tree tubes is that bluebirds can become trapped in them. The bluebird enters the tube to explore a potential nesting site, but is unable to get out. To help fight against this, many tree tubes now come with mesh netting to put over the top of the tube. The tree can grow through this netting, but it will keep bluebirds from entering.

Bud capping seedlings is another option for protecting young trees. If a large number of trees need to be protected, the expense of equipment and labor for putting tree tubes on all the trees could get quite high. Bud caps, which protect only the central twig, not the entire tree, can be a solution to this problem. The bud cap protects the part of the tree that is responsible for upward growth. If this part of the tree is broken or eaten off, the tree will most likely turn into a bush instead of a tall, straight tree. A bud cap is simply a small sheet of paper stapled around the leader of the seedling that needs protection. Deer do not like to chew on the paper, so the bud cap prevents them from attacking the central twig. Bud caps should be applied to trees in late fall because winter is the time of year that browsing pressure from deer is strongest on trees, so the bud caps should be in place before winter. By the end of the winter, most of the bud caps will have fallen off the trees due to weathering, but some bud caps may remain on the trees into the spring. These remaining bud caps do not stunt the tree's growth because the paper is wrapped around the tree in such a way that there is an opening for the tree to grow through. Bud capping should be done every fall until the top of the tree is out of reach of deer grazing. Bud caps are used most widely on coniferous trees because they stay on better. It can be hard to bud cap deciduous trees because the paper tends to slide down the young tree. Even with the difficulty, some people have had success in bud capping deciduous trees and have found that when they stay in place, they do help to deter browsing deer.

MORE RESOURCES:

Tending White Pine

MN Department of Natural Resources

<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/treecare/whitepine/tending.html>

Riparian Forest Buffer Design and Maintenance

Maryland Department of Natural Resources Forest Service

http://www.dnr.state.md.us/forests/download/rfb_design&maintenance.pdf

Tree Protective Tubes

Kansas Forest Service, Kansas State University

<http://www.kansasforests.org/conservation/PDFs/treetubes.pdf>



Bud caps on deciduous trees



Tree tube protecting a young elm tree