

Post Rock Answers

By Cassie Thiessen February 13th 2026

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Protect Your Landscape from Deer

Deer may be fun to watch as they jump through our backyards and run in the woods, but they can cause trouble in our landscape. Deer damage is a major problem in many of our backyards during the winter months.

Bucks rub on saplings and young trees to get the velvet off their antlers. In late winter their rubbing intensifies to help shed their antlers. This causes extensive damage to the bark and often results in a slow death of the tree. Protecting trees from damage is important in areas populated with deer. Once deer have damaged your tree, there is unfortunately little that can be done to heal the tree. If the damage was only to one side, it may survive, although it will be weakened and have an ugly scar. When bucks rub on a tree it damages the phloem and xylem wood. These are water and nutrient conducting tissues, when damaged, the tree won't be able to take up water or send food down to its roots. The cambium layer of wood is in the middle of the phloem and xylem. If it is the only wood damaged the tree will usually be able to heal.

In north central Kansas, it is often necessary to protect our young trees. To be safe, protect all trees, deciduous and evergreen, under 6 to 8 inches in trunk diameter. Here are some control options to protect your landscape;

There are several methods for protecting young trees. Some are more effective than others. The simplest method, but also the least dependable, is the use of strong odor deterrent materials. The most common product on the market is called "Liquid Fence," which is sprayed on the tree. Predator urine is also sold as a deterrent. Deer repellents are not highly effective because they wear off with rain and snow. They should be applied at least once a month, or after every rainfall starting from early fall till late winter. If you happen to miss a timely application, your tree will likely be damaged.

Another method is to wrap the tree using paper tree wrap or vinyl spiral wrap. Paper wrap is less effective as it can be worn through by the deer. Tree wraps can be found at many garden centers and nurseries. Wrap the trunk, covering all exposed bark, from the base until you reach the bottom branches. Be sure to remove the wrap in late winter/early spring before the tree leaves

out. Corrugated plastic tubing is another option for protecting young trees. If bucks continue to rub on the plastic, the friction can rip the bark of the tree.

The most effective method is to construct a rigid fence out and around the trees. Start by using three to four heavy duty metal fence posts. Drive them into the ground at the dripline of the evergreen tree. For deciduous trees, put them 2 feet or more from the trunk. The fence posts provide a rigid object for the deer to rub against. You could stop there, or you could add another level of defense. For additional protection, wrap the fence posts with a woven wire. Concrete reinforcing wire or similar material works well. This encloses the tree and prevents the deer from getting to it. You can also use perimeter electric fences 8 to 10 feet tall, baited electric fences and meshes, and electric deer shocking devices.

If you are down to a last resort. There are a number of home remedies to keep deer at bay. These include hanging all types of odorous soaps or even human hair in the lower branches. These methods are not proven and may provide limited control. I have heard of many people having success using Irish Spring soap. Simply wipe/rub the bar of soap up and down the tree trunk. Once that is accomplished the remaining piece of the bar is hung in the trees about deer head height. Plant an herb garden with strong flavored plants like chives, thyme, garlic, and oleander to deter deer. You can also try scaring the deer away using strobe lights, noise making devices or letting dogs roam around your property.

Protecting your landscape from deer is important to save your valuable plant investments. It's easy to get started with a few simple protective measures. If you have any questions about keeping deer out of your landscape, contact your local Extension Office.

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