

FAIRFAX COUNTY WILDLIFE



BEAVERS: TREE PROTECTION

Beavers are highly adaptable and occur in many urban and suburban areas throughout Fairfax County where there is a food supply and a body of water. While beavers provide numerous ecological benefits, their feeding habits and dam/den building activities can also lead to conflicts when they cause damage to trees. Most beaver conflicts related to property damage can be solved by implementing habitat modification measures.

Cylindrical cages or tree guards are a practical and effective way to protect individual trees from beavers. Wire cylinders placed around the base of the tree trunks create a physical barrier that prevents beavers from gnawing on the trees.

Beavers favor trees like willow, alder, maple, birch, poplar, aspen, cottonwood, and cherry. Conifers are least preferred, but beavers may still girdle and kill these trees to encourage the growth of preferred food plants. Beavers typically prefer to fell trees within 50 feet of water but can travel farther for preferred species. Keep these points in mind as you determine which trees to prioritize for wrapping.



By implementing these protective measures, you can safeguard valuable trees while allowing beaver coexistence.

How to Prevent Tree Damage

- Use galvanized welded wire fencing (14-gauge with 2x4 mesh) to encircle the trunk. Avoid flexible wire like chicken mesh, which is less robust.
- Fencing that is 4 feet in height is recommended.
- Leave a 6-inch to 12-inch gap between the tree trunk and the fencing to allow future tree growth. Fasten the ends of the fence by bending the cut ends together or secure using hog rings or zip ties.
- Cut and flare out the fencing for low branches, roots, or sloped ground. Ensure the fence is securely anchored to the ground with landscape pins or stakes to prevent beavers from digging or pushing the fence up to gnaw underneath.
- Wrap trees before or immediately after the first signs of chewing. Once a tree is fully girdled, it will die, so prioritize wrapping healthy, high-value trees.
- The wire cylinder tree guard is low-maintenance and should be effective for many years. Materials can be found at local hardware stores. Regular checks may be needed to ensure no damage or gaps have developed.
- For clusters of shrubs or grove of trees, encircle the priority area with single, larger diameter fence instead of individual tree guards, as needed.

*Fairfax County Animal Services Division
Animal Protection Police & Wildlife Section
4500 West Ox Road
Fairfax, VA 22030
Dispatch 703-691-2131*

*Virginia Wildlife Conflict Helpline
Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources
& USDA Wildlife Services
855-571-9003 (toll-free)*



Fairfax County
Police Department,
Animal Services
Division – Wildlife Section:
(703) 246-6868 TTY 711