



When You Need A Tree Cage

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Building Welded Wire Tree Cages

Got a lot of deer? Most of Michigan has too many to successfully regenerate most hardwood (broad-leafed) trees. Deer often prefer nursery-grown seedlings. It's disappointing to see hard work browsed to death. As a result, seedlings will need to be protected from deer, which will cost more money than the site prep, seedling cost, and planting. The cages should be emplaced with the planting. If a delay is necessary, deer repellent will buy you some time. However, it's important to get those cages in place as soon as possible. Here are a few thoughts to consider for your area.



- Deer hit seedlings hardest in late winter and early spring. If you don't see hardwood saplings in your woods, you probably have a deer problem.
- Until seedlings grow beyond browse height, about five feet, they'll be vulnerable.
- Young saplings are vulnerable to buck rubs, which cause permanent damage to the tree.
- Deer repellents are effective, but must be applied regularly for many years, including during the winter.
- Tree tubes can also work well, until the tree emerges from the tube and becomes deer food.
- Shorter fencing and stakes will work, but the cage will need to be raised on stakes when the trees grow to the top of the cage. A promise that is easy to forget.
- Stakes and plastic fencing works, too, but is more work per tree than welded wire fencing.

If you're planting only several dozen trees, rather than acres and acres, and willing to invest some sweat equity and few hundred dollars, then wire cages are the best way to protect hardwood seedlings (and some softwoods / conifers). The cages need to be five-foot tall and removable after tree heights exceed browse height. What will you need?

Here's a **parts list**.

- Rolls of welded wire fencing with a 2x4 inch mesh and five feet tall. Four feet is not tall enough. Six feet is excessive. Rolls often come in 100-foot lengths, will cost \$75-100, which will make about 15 cages. You can find less expensive fencing but it won't work as well and may result in other problems.
- A heavy-duty wire cutter with a spring-back design.
- A regular pair of pliers.
- A couple of heavy weights to hold unrolled fencing in place.
- Stakes are *not* needed.



Step-by-Step Protocol

Pick a nice weather day, put some music on, and grab a cold beer. Find a good place with enough room to unroll lengths of the fencing and stack the accumulated cages. This doesn't work easily indoors. Variations are acceptable, of course. After a few cages, you will likely find a rhythm.

1. Use a pliers, or other tool, to **remove packaging fasteners** on the roll of fencing. Be careful with removing the last fastener, as the roll can "spring" open resulting in scrapes or pokes on your legs. Collect those fasteners to avoid finding them in tire treads or other undesirable places.



2. Put a **weight on the free end** of the roll, then **unroll** the fencing for about 20 feet. This gives you enough room to measure out the first cage.

3. Measure out a **length of six or seven feet**. Use either a tape measure or just the length of your foot. It's not an overly precise protocol. If you go a little less than seven feet, you'll get 15 cages per 100-foot roll of fencing.



4. **Snip across** the fencing, making sure to leave long ends. These will be used later to close the cage. Be careful with last wire cut, as both ends of the fencing will pop-up, which can result in more cuts and pokes. Another weight can be useful, here.



5. Roll the cut fencing into a tube and, using the long ends left from the cutting, **close the seam** by wrapping three or four loose ends around the abutting edge of the fencing. You don't need to wrap all the free ends. Eventually, you'll need to remove the cage by un-bending these wraps. As few as possible is better. Really.



6. **Remove the bottom wire ring** by snipping it off. Leave long ends. These long ends will be pushed into the ground to secure the cage. It holds the cage in all but the highest of winds.

These cages are stable. However, tornadoes, running deer, bears, and whatever can knock them over. So, inspect your planting occasionally. It's fun to watch the trees grow. Once the trees are large enough to escape browsing and damage from buck rubs, then the cages can be removed. This will probably take at least ten years. At that time, use a pliers to un-bend the wire wraps on the seam. This is where fewer wraps is an advantage. The cage can then be used again.

The 2x4 inch mesh also keeps out rabbits, which can also sometimes be a problem. Girdling by mice and voles is another issue. A plastic tree-wrap will help prevent damage from these confounding rodents. They're about a dollar apiece. Two-liter plastic bottles are free, but need some cutting.

Planting hardwoods is an act of faith and optimism, as well as an investment in time, money, and hope. They are surely a nice thing to have around!