Installing Tree Tubes
Tree tubes (sometimes called tree shelters) protect newly planted trees from deer browse. But when not properly installed, they can damage the tree. This slideshow will show you how to install tree tubes for success.
Before we get to the tree tube, you need a stake to hold up the tube. Tree stakes can be made of wood, PVC pipe, or metal. The MyWoodlot team recommends using wood stakes (oak or treated pine) at least 1” in diameter and at least 5’ tall.
Installing wooden tree stakes requires either a heavy hammer or a 2-3 pound mallet. Gloves can help prevent splinters.
Install stakes on the uphill or upstream side of the tree. Stakes should be 2-3 inches away from the tree (about the width of your fist). The stake must be vertical. Use your shoe or boot to help anchor it as you get started pounding it in.
The stake holding this tube was installed too far from the tree (6 inches). This damaged the tree’s roots because the tube could not be centered over the tree. The tube scraped the roots and put pressure on the tree, partially pulling it out of the ground.
This stake was installed too close to the tree (less than 1 inch away). This can lead to bark damage because of a lack of space for the tree tube.
How deep should the stake be pounded? You want the stake to be sturdy, but if pounded in too far, the tube’s top zip tie won’t have enough stake to hold it in place. To get the right height, hold the tube next to the stake and make sure there is 3”-6” of stake above the top zip tie (about the width of your open hand).
This stake is too short. The top of the tube is unsupported and could easily fall over in strong winds.
Which Tree Tube to Purchase?

Tree tubes come in many shapes and sizes. Some arrive flat, while others are preformed into tubes. The MyWoodlot Team recommends preformed tubes that are at least 5 feet tall.

There are two leading products meeting these criteria: the Miracle Tube and the Tubex Combitube. We have used both in our tree planting projects. The following slides compare them. Both tubes are very similar.
The Tubex Combitube is green and comes in groups of 5. It has clusters of tiny air holes, a fluted top to prevent bark damage, and two long, releasable zip ties. It is reinforced for added strength.
The Miracle Tube is tan and comes in groups of 5. It has evenly spaced mid-sized air holes, a non-fluted top, and two releasable zip ties. It is not reinforced.
Which Plants Can I Protect with Tree Tubes?

Tree tubes work best with deciduous trees (ones that lose their leaves in the fall). They can work on some of the largest deciduous shrubs and some evergreen trees, but this is not recommended. The growth structure of shrubs and evergreen trees usually is not compatible with tree tubes. If shrubs and evergreens must be protected, consider other options like cages or fencing.
Some trees are too large for tree tubes. Pruning to make the tree fit would just cause too much damage. If the side branches are more than 12 inches long, or if the tree is more than 6-7 feet tall, then it may be too large for a tree tube. These trees were 5-7 feet tall but had large crowns, so bark protectors were installed instead of tree tubes.
Preparing the Tree for the Tree Tube

Some trees may need to be pruned prior to tube installation. Correct pruning can help the tree fit inside the tube better, improve ventilation inside the tube, and speed up tree growth.
This hornbeam tree is multi-trunked, and has extensive branching. It will live if placed inside a tree tube, but the tree will be unable to breathe and it will not put enough energy into growing up and out of the tube. It was pruned into a single trunk, and all lower branches were removed.
Installing Tree Tubes

No special tools are required to install tree tubes. Each tube should come with two zip ties.
Tree tubes have a top and a bottom. The air holes should always be at the top. The tree can die if the tube is installed upside down.
Carefully feed the tree branches and leaves into the tube. You can gently bunch the branches together as you do this.
Twist the tube as you slide it down over the tree. This helps prevent the leaves and branches from getting stuck on the inside of the tube. These students temporarily removed the zip tie too because it was catching the leaves and branches.
This oak tree got snagged on the inside of the tube. Its branches were bent downwards, and some snapped. Rotating the tube and removing the zip tie could have prevented this from happening.
Attach both zip ties to the tube, but don’t cinch them tight. There should be about 2-3 inches of space between the tube and the stake. This flexibility will help the tree develop a stronger trunk and roots.
Following the steps in this slide show will give your trees a better chance of survival so they can grow from this….
…into this.
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