

Prevent Sunscald Damage to Trees by Wrapping Them

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Tree wrapping can be a family activity

Photos by F. Bogardus

Why: Trees are an investment that can benefit your landscape for years if they are properly planted and cared for. Colorado winters can be tough on young trees and it makes sense to take some simple steps to provide a bit of protection during the winter.

Our trees can actually get sunburn in the winter; the burn will damage the bark, leaving a damaged area open to disease problems during the warmer months. The reason for the injury is that our bright, sunny, winter days can often heat the tree trunk sufficiently for the

tissue under the bark to become active. Reflected light off snow or light surfaces can exacerbate the heating. When the temperature drops dramatically at night, the active tissues are damaged when they freeze. This cycle of freezing and thawing with temperature fluctuations can cause severe injury. The damage is frequently on the southwest side of the tree (think afternoon warming, quickly followed by night time freezing). The trees most affected are thin barked trees such as ash, aspen, birch, cottonwood, fruit trees, and honeylocust, maple and willow trees. Young trees are the most susceptible as the bark has not yet thickened. The damaged areas will be discolored. The bark may crack or slough off revealing an area of dead tissue.

How: The first thing you should do is go out and take a look at the trees in your landscape. Look for damage from prior winters. Consider how much southwest exposure each tree has. Think about reflective surfaces e.g. light walls, areas of snow accumulation. Make a decision as to which trees need some winter protection.



Sunscald injury

To protect the trees, you can purchase a paper wrap for the trees. The wrap comes in various size rolls (3" wide by 50' long is a common size). It should be available at any garden center.

Wrap the paper strip around the tree starting at the bottom and forming an overlapping spiral up the tree to at least the first major branch (the second if the tree is very small. Secure the tape at the top and bottom by using an adhesive tape on the paper wrap (duct tape works well). Be careful not to tape directly to the tree. The tape should only touch the paper wrap.

In the spring be sure to remove the wrapping. Leaving it on during the warm months gives damaging pests a sheltered environment in which to hide. Also, if left on too long the wrap could limit the growth of the tree.

When: The wrapping should be applied in October or November, no later than Thanksgiving. The wrap should come off by the end of April.

What's Needed: Paper tree wrapping, available from your favorite nursery and adhesive tape to secure the wrap.

When you have questions, CSU Extension has research-based answers. Get answers to your horticultural questions by calling the Colorado Master Gardener Volunteer Help Desk at 520-7684, or send an email to CSUmg2@elpasoco.com. Note: CMG Volunteers are "on call" during our winter hours. Please allow several days for a response.