

Tips for Protecting Your Property from Beaver Damage

By Betsy Washington

Generally, beavers cannot access properties with seawalls that are 2' or more above the lake bottom. However, beavers are notoriously clever, and will climb steps, ladders, or small openings for drainage to gain access to desirable plants.

Beavers have even climbed up on piles of sticks, bricks, and other debris and used their teeth to grab hold of seawalls and leverage themselves up from the lake. Beavers prefer to take trees within short distances of the water, but they have been known to travel more than 150' from the water to get to desirable plants. That means they are capable of reaching plants in front yards when food is scarce. Busy beavers can take down several good sized trees in a single night of work. Prevention is this best policy! All waterfront property owners are urged to protect their valuable trees to prevent loss to beavers - before damage occurs!

Tree Cages: The best way to protect your trees is to wrap them with cylinder cages made of **sturdy galvanized welded wire fencing with 2 - 4" X 2 - 4" mesh** openings. Fencing should be at least 3' high. In addition to the fencing, you will need a pair of wire snips and gloves. Encircle the trunk, leaving at least 6" between the tree and cage on all sides so the tree has room to grow and so that beavers cannot lean against or gnaw through the fencing. Large exposed roots that extend outside the cage may need to be protected too. To make a cage, measure the circumference of your tree adding at least one foot to the measurement. Cut the appropriate length of fencing from a roll of wire fencing. Cut every other horizontal wire at one end of the length of fencing before you make the cylinder for ease, then wrap the fencing around the base of your tree to make a cylinder. To fasten, bend the cut wires into hooks to secure to the other side of the cylinder. You may anchor the cages to the ground with a couple of stakes to keep beavers from pushing it against the tree or you may bend the top few inches of the wire against the tree to hold the wire cage away from the tree. We have found that dark green or black, plastic coated fencing is nearly invisible in wooded yards. Rolls of this fencing are available at Home Depot and most hardware stores.

Large groups of closely spaced trees or shrubs may be wrapped as a group to facilitate protection of valuable landscape plantings. Check your cages periodically to make sure they are secure and in good shape. They should last for many years.

Paint/Sand Mix: "Painting" tree trunks or wood with a mixture of latex and gritty fine or masonry sand is a method that has been successful in preventing gnawing and beaver damage to trees and to seawalls, docks and other wooden structures. Beavers dislike the gritty feel of sand in their mouth. Latex allows the bark to "breathe", while the gritty texture of the sand deters beavers. This is not recommended for newly planted trees smaller than about 6' in height and must be renewed every two or three years.

- Use 8 oz. of fine sand to 1 quart of exterior grade latex paint
- For larger batches mix 20 oz. of sand to 1 gal. latex paint.

Paint stores can match the color of a bark sample of your tree if you are picky about their appearance. We have also had success in using a clear latex paint or shellac mixed thoroughly with sand, however this may not allow small trees to breathe. Young restoration trees can be protected with a combination of products like "4 the Birds," or "Birds Away," and sand. Apply the sticky substance with a dedicated brush that has also been dipped in sand, and paint a strip about four feet high on the trunks of saplings. Avoid using this method on older trees, which might be used by trunk-climbing birds. Paint trees to a height of between 3.5 to 4' and renew the paint every 2 - 3 years as needed. A number of trees in the woods beside Beach 3 have been "painted" with latex and sand and have not been bothered by beavers.

This technique is also effective in protecting seawalls and docks that may be subject to gnawing by beavers.

Shoreline Barriers: If you have a large shoreline that is heavily vegetated and not protected by a seawall, you may consider installing a barrier across vulnerable, low parts of your shoreline, to protect natural dense and layered plantings. All fences must be approved in advance by the ARC. The ARC can advise you on various options and examples of appropriate fencing, barrier or exclusion devices.

- *Fencing:* Sturdy dark green or black plastic coated galvanized wire fencing with 2 - 4" x 2 - 4" openings is effective and is visually unobtrusive on wooded properties. Fencing should be at least 30" high and held securely with fence posts driven into the ground and spaced every 8 - 10' in vulnerable locations or low spots. You can see examples of this type fencing at the Beach 5 RPA Garden.
- *Low triangular barriers:* Four foot wide rolls of fencing as outlined above, may also be bent lengthwise into a low equilateral triangle which can be staked into the ground near the shoreline or on the landward side of a low seawall. While still experimental, a double row of these low barriers have been effective at deterring beavers. To construct this type of barrier, lay a convenient length of the fencing on the ground lengthwise in front of you and bend the two sides up to meet at the top forming a low triangle. Cut every other wire on one side and securely bend and hook the cut wires to the other side of the fencing at the top of the triangular barrier as outlined for Tree Cages. Stake cages to the ground securely. Vines and low plantings may be planted beside or in the cages to help camouflage them. *Planting for aesthetics:* To maintain the natural beauty and aesthetics of our lake shore, it is strongly recommended that any fencing be placed several feet back from the water's edge. Any valuable trees or plants between the lake and fencing should be protected or caged as described above. It is strongly recommended that you plant several low ornamental vines or shrubs along the fencing or barrier to help camouflage it and maintain the natural beauty of shoreline. The Environmental Committee can recommend appropriate plants.

Repellents: Repellent sprays are a much less reliable means of protection, but may be used on small saplings and foliage plants and shrubs as a deterrent and may be effective for short time periods. Repellents seem to work best when other nearby food sources are available. Ro-pel is the only deterrent currently registered as a beaver deterrent with U.S. EPA. Research indicates that repellents containing sulfur compounds, such as Deer Off and Big Game Repellent Powder, are effective as temporary deterrents, but they are not yet registered for this use with EPA. Growing Season Repellent from Nott Products is reported to protect plants for up to two months, will not clog sprayers and can be used around edibles. All of these will need to be reapplied at regular intervals.

Wildlife Conflict Resolution Services: For homeowners that may not want or be able to protect their properties by constructing barriers or wrapping their trees, the LBA has collaborated with the United States' Humane Society to tailor a wildlife/beaver conflict resolution package that conforms to LBA's Beaver Management Policy and the unique circumstances of our lake. This is available to Lake Barcroft residents for a competitive fee. Please see the separate handout entitled "Humane Wildlife Services Beaver Activity Assessment and Wildlife Conflict Solutions" for details". Other neighborhood landscapers such as Delfino's Landscaping Services have experience in beaver exclusion methods such as constructing barriers, fencing, and wrapping trees and may also be available to help residents protect their properties.

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