

Fruit Tree Cages

My husband and I live in N.E. Santa Rosa and our property borders a lot of undeveloped, forested acreage. Given our location, we have a lot of wildlife and a lot of this wildlife really appreciates the fruit from our trees. I don't mind sharing with the animals but to be totally honest, until last year, we rarely got anything. We tried bird netting with little success: I didn't like that it trapped some of the birds and I found that "something" whether squirrels or birds, always seemed to get around the netting and take the fruit. I also have to admit that I was unwilling to go to war with the critters. I was willing to put our young trees into the ground with metal gopher wire around their roots but I was not going to spend my life trapping gophers or squirrels or raccoons or skunks. I simply wasn't going to do it.

Still I really wanted to actually eat some of the fruit from our trees. After all, John and I were successful in grafting several different scions to our various trees [courtesy of the CRFG chapter here in Sonoma Co.]. One solution that I came up with was to buy fence panels and place them around our trees but the fencing material in the panels that were available for purchase seemed to be big enough that most birds would be able to get through without too much effort. Worse, these fence panels are ugly [not to mention pretty expensive].

So finally we came up with what I consider a reasonable solution to this problem. John designed a frame to go around our groupings of 3 trees/hole. He made it with pressure-treated 10' long 2X4 lumber and used 3" ceramic coated lag screws to build the frame.

This is a top view of these tree cages:



Here's another view:



When the frames were erected around each of the groups of trees, we then inserted plastic coated hooks to secure the fencing. This is what it looked like:



When we were actually starting to get fruit on our trees, we bought a roll of black, 8' x 100' plastic fencing [it was called deer fencing] and cut it into lengths to fit the frame. We then attached the plastic fencing using the hook on the frames and totally enclosed our trees.

Posts with plastic fencing attached looked like:



It was pretty easy to unhook the fencing and go inside the enclosure if I ever needed to pick fruit or fertilize the trees.

So, in summary, to enclose two groups of trees cost between \$250. - \$300. for everything [the special lag bolts were close to \$45.00 in cost]. Most of the supplies we bought from Friedman's in Santa Rosa [we waited until we got a 20% off coupon for one of our purchases]. The other good thing was that birds don't seem to get trapped in this "deer" fencing. We didn't enclose the very top of the enclosures and that did not seem to be a problem. Last year was the first year we got regular fruit from our trees so I have to think that this worked – at least it worked last year! Terry Spear