Column Name - The Heartland Minute

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"Steps to Protect Fruit Trees from Mice"

Fruit tree bark is a tasty alternative, and often favorite, food source for mice in the winter. Mice will chew through the outer layer of bark at the base of trees. Heavy feeding from the mice reduces the tree's ability to transport food to the roots and can result in death.

To prevent damage from mice, start by keeping the ground around trees clear of debris. This will remove the protective layer mice are seeking to stay hidden from predators. Weeds, leaves, and grass should all be maintained. Even mulch can create a hideout for small rodents. One helpful trick is to wrap the base of the trunks with hardware cloth at least 18-inches high. Mice will not be able to access the bark through this material. However, be sure to remove the wire during the active growing season to prevent damaging the trunk as it grows.

You can also utilize baited traps to help eliminate rodent problems. Be sure to always follow label directions for such traps, and to use extreme caution when handling the bait and follow proper procedures to keep pets, children, and other safe. If the trap is an open bait style, you could place them in a locked wooden box with a hole big enough for only rodents to enter.

Monitor fruit trees regularly for signs of damage to the trunk. Damage can be more than an aesthetic problem if not remedied quickly.

Information comes from Kansas State University horticulture expert, Cynthia Domenghini.

For more information regarding upcoming programs, Agriculture and Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, or K-State Research and Extension call the office at 620-583-7455, email me, Ben Sims, at benjam63@ksu.edu, or stop by the office which is located inside the courthouse. Be sure to follow K-State Research and Extension- Greenwood County on Facebook for the most up-to-date information on Extension education programs and the Greenwood County 4-H program.