

# Sapsucker Damage

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**Q.** I have a tree with rows of little holes in the bark all along a tree limb. Is this caused by tree borers?

**A.** Our column on tree borers has prompted quite a few questions such as the one above. These types of holes are not caused by bores but by a type of wood pecker called a sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus* spp). If have a tree that has a series of small holes in rows pecked through the bark of the trunk or tree limb, this is caused by a sapsucker seeking food. Over time, this continuous feeding by the bird extends the number of rows of holes and the resulting loss of sap may weaken the tree and provide access for harmful insects or plant diseases. In severe cases it may cause the loss of a limb or the entire tree or shrub.

The best control is wire mesh, such as chicken wire or screening, wrapped loosely around tree trunks or limbs being damaged by a sapsucker. This will often persuade the bird to relocate. Unfortunately, it may require covering a large area with mesh because the sapsucker will just move to a nearby tree or shrub and begin pecking again. Bird netting can also be used to exclude the sapsucker if it is a smaller tree or shrub.

Some folks claim frightening devices such as plastic twirlers, aluminum foil or brightly colored plastic strips hung from the tree work to scare the birds away. The University of California found this worked with inconsistent success and many times only worked until the birds got used to the scare device. According to the University of California IPM site, "Various other gadgets or devices are marketed for frightening woodpeckers, including a sound-activated giant model of a climbing spider. Some claim that various frightening devices resolved their particular problem. This is possible only if the woodpecker has not become well-attached to that particular location. Once established woodpeckers are persistent and are not easily driven from their territory or selected pecking site."

If the damage from the sapsucker is not too severe, keep the tree well-watered and fertilized and it most likely will heal over the wounds caused by this bird.