

UI Extension Forestry Information Series

Deck the Boughs with Smelly Brew to Keep Tree Thieves Away from You

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The holiday season is fast approaching. Unfortunately, that's when many landscape evergreens, especially blue spruce, make a fast getaway in the back of a tree thief's car. Tree thieves, looking for a free Christmas tree, will snatch trees from yards, city parks, Christmas tree plantations, windbreaks and tree farms. A blue spruce will cost about \$10 a foot to replace, but its value in your yard is much higher. A nice looking, 5-foot-tall blue spruce in your yard can have an appraised value of up to \$300. Obviously, trees along roads are most vulnerable.

Fortunately, the University of Nebraska came up with a recipe for a smelly concoction that deters potential Christmas tree thieves. The City of Westminster, Colorado, has used this brew on trees in its parks and eliminated thievery. The few weeks of stinky trees are generally accepted as a small price to pay to save park trees.

The smelly brew is easy to mix and apply, but it's not

cheap. Mix one part fox urine into one part water. (In Moscow, ID 2 ounces of fox urine costs about \$4.) Add 3-4 ounces of "skunk scent" (sometimes sold under the trade name "K9 Call") to each gallon of mix. Pour the brew into a plastic spray bottle and spray onto the trees.

Mix this brew in a well ventilated area and wear rubber gloves throughout the operation, even during mixing, so as not to lose any friends or spouses. The scent will last 1-2 weeks, so reapplication may be necessary. The fox urine and skunk scent can usually be purchased at any hunting or trapping supply store. As an extra deterrent, place a small sign on susceptible trees stating your trees have been sprayed to smell bad.

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