

Using Velcro® for Plant Ties

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When you stake a plant, you have a couple of choices: you can tie the plant loosely to the stake so that the plant has room to grow; or you can tie the plant tightly to the stake. If you tie tightly, you have to remember to loosen the tie as the plant grows, or it's going to girdle the plant.

We've lost a number of very small azaleas and other plants to the deer. What seems to happen is they pull the plants out of the ground in the course of taking a nibble. If you don't see this pretty quickly, the roots dry out and you have lost the plants. This can also be caused by frost heaving, but our plants seem to be pulled out rather than pushed out. In either case, tying the plant very tightly to a stake can solve the problem, but at the risk of girdling the plant in a year or two.

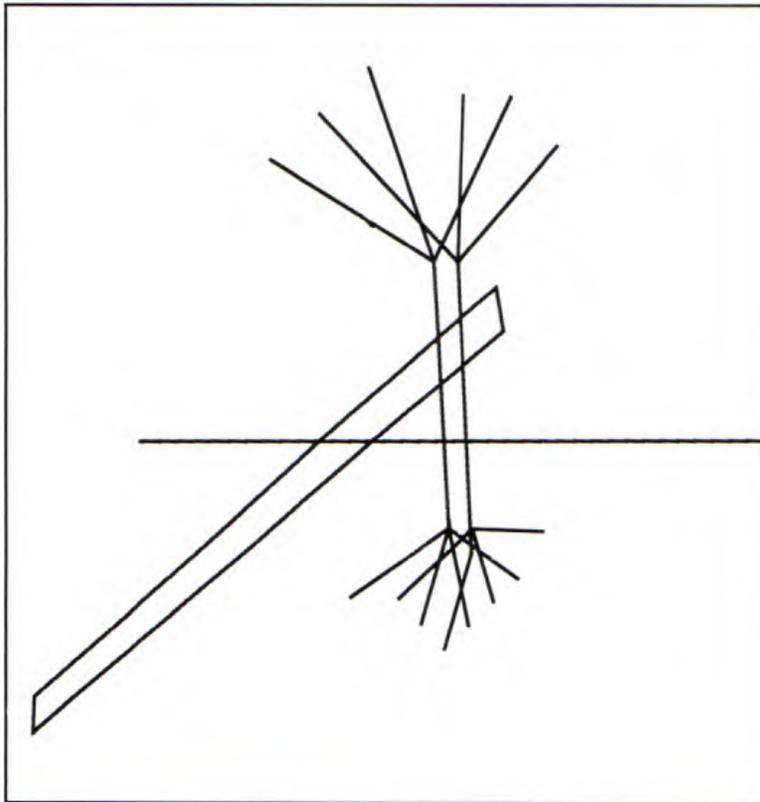


Figure 1. (TOP) Stake Placement

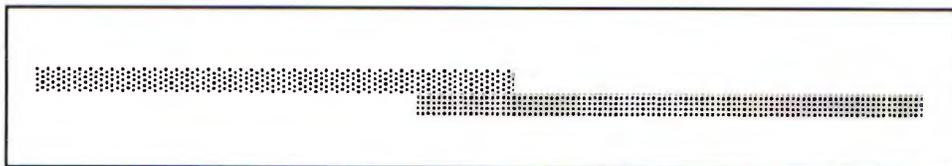


Figure 2. (BOTTOM) Velcro Arrangement

The solution that seems to be working for us is to use Velcro®, the familiar "hook and eye" fabric, for the tie. I brought a 15-yard roll of 3/4" wide sticky-back Velcro® for about \$15. The hook side and the eye side are on separate tapes on a paper backing. I split each tape lengthwise with a scissors as I use it, and use about six inches of each tape per plant. The narrow width seems to be enough, and keeps the cost down to about 15 or 20 cents per plant.

You can either press an inch or two of the sticky-back sides of each of the tapes onto each other to make a single eight- to ten-inch tape, or you can press an inch or two of the Velcro® sides onto each other to make the long tape. The difference is that if you put the sticky sides together first, the sticky side will be toward the plant after you use the tape; if you put the Velcro® sides together first, the sticky side will be toward the outside. The general idea is shown in Figure 1.

I put the stake (usually a 1/2-inch piece of a cedar roof shingle) into the ground at a 45° angle to the main stem of the plant, and push it in until the end of the stake is just even with or slightly overlapping the stem of the plant (see Figure 2). Then I wrap the Velcro® tape as tightly as I can around both the stake and the plant at the point where they overlap, and put the Velcro® hook and eye sides against each other. The resulting tie binds the plant extremely tightly to the stake, and forms a triangle with the ground. It takes a great deal of force to pull the combination out of the ground, much more than it takes to pull either one out separately.

The big advantage of Velcro® over other plant tie materials is that the tie is going to stay tight until the steadily increasing pressure resulting from the growth of the plant eventually forces the hook and eye to separate. Thus, I can tie it as tightly as I can and still forget that I staked the plant—if it needs to, the plant is going to break the tie rather than being girdled by it. □