Wildlife-friendly temporary horticultural netting

For commercial and non-commercial fruit and nut trees

Protecting crops and wildlife

Temporary netting is a popular way to protect fruit and nut trees from wildlife. It also provides some protection from sunburn, wind and hail damage.

There are a range of netting options available to protect crops from wildlife.

Unfortunately, some netting (or the way it is erected) can entangle birds, possums, flying foxes, snakes and lizards; causing stress, injury or death.

For individual trees in domestic backyards, the best way to prevent animals becoming entangled in a net is to avoid it altogether by **protecting individual fruit** using fruit protection bags.

However, if you choose to use temporary netting, it is possible to protect the produce and wildlife by following the simple principles outlined below.

Light (colour)

Use a net(s) lighter in colour than the background foliage, *ideally white*, so birds and mammals can see and avoid it, especially at night.

Strong

Use a durable, densely woven or knitted net(s) that does not stretch and enable animals to become entangled[1].

Alternatively, use 30% (shade factor) shade cloth. Avoid thin, lightweight nets (e.g. extruded) as they are easy for animals to pull out of shape and become entangled, and are not very durable.

Small (aperture)

Use a net(s) with apertures 5 mm x 5 mm or less (if single strand, 2 mm x 2 mm or less) to prevent access by small animals (e.g. birds) and/or the entanglement of larger animals' wings or feet.

The finger test – choose netting that you cannot poke your finger through.

Taut

The net should be taut enough that it does not sink under the weight of animals or form folds around them[2] when they land or crawl over it. The best way to do this is to make a sturdy frame:

- The frame could be made from commercial grade polythene pipe, metal or timber (checkout the internet for construction techniques). Allow for some tree growth and to provide some distance between determined animals and the produce.
- Tension the net tight against the frame and stop animals getting under it by weighing it down (e.g. with pipes or timber wrapped around the ends of the net), or pin down with tent pegs and tuck any excess net under.
- Fasten the net to the frame (e.g. with cable/zip ties, tie wires or string) to keep it taut and prevent sagging. Do not forget to create an opening and fasten tight, e.g. with butterfly clips or clothes pegs.

The bounce test – the net should ideally be tight enough that animals almost 'bounce' off it when they land on it.

[1] Ideally, made from high-density polyethylene monofilament, a minimum of 500 microns thick, with woven selvedge edges that give extra strength and ensure the net will not unravel.

[2] Common brush tail possums can weigh up to 3.5 kg, common ringtails 1.1 kg, and grey-headed flying foxes up to 1 kg

Check the net regularly

During the fruiting season, check the net regularly for holes, or trapped or entangled wildlife.

Trapped or entangled wildlife

Trapped but uninjured wildlife

- release the wildlife as soon as discovered
- check the integrity of the net.

Entangled and/or injured wildlife

Entangled and/or injured animals are likely to be highly stressed and potentially dangerous.

DO NOT attempt to remove them from the net – cover them with a towel and contact a licensed wildlife rescuer group (e.g. Fauna Rescue SA) trained to handle and care for wildlife.

DO NOT attempt to rescue entangled and/or injured flying foxes or bats of any kind.

DO NOT handle dead flying foxes or bats due to the risk of infection by Australian Bat Lyssavirus, which can be transmitted by a bite or scratch from an infected animal.

Call the Fauna Rescue SA Microbats and Flying Foxes Rescue hotline on 8486 1139.

DO NOT attempt to rescue entangled and/or injured snakes. Call a licenced snake catcher.

Risks of entanglement

As they struggle to escape, entangled wildlife can become stressed, break bones and tear wing membranes.

Thin monofilament line can cut into animals; causing deep wounds or stop circulation.

Ultimately, these injuries can lead to shock and even death, particularly if the animal is trapped for a long time.

Entangled flying foxes may also be mothers nursing young that are waiting at a nursery roost. If these mothers cannot return to the roost within a day, these young will starve.

Netting with large apertures can trap native fauna
Photo: Victorian Advocates for Animals

Destruction permit

Under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972*, a Permit to Destroy Wildlife may be granted to allow for the destruction or removal of wildlife that are causing damage to the environment, crops, stock or other property (including to nets).

The destruction of any animal must comply with codes of practice or animal welfare standards outlined in the *Animal Welfare Act 1985* and the regulations under that Act.

For more information

Animal Welfare Act; National Parks and Wildlife Act: legislation.sa.gov.au

Queensland Government Netting Fruit Trees guide environment.des.qld.gov.au

Grey-headed Flying-foxes in South Australia: naturalresources.sa.gov.au/adelaidemtloftyranges

Fauna Rescue of South Australia Inc.: faunarescue.org.au