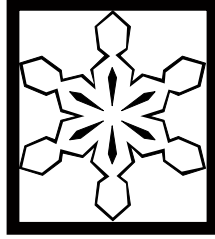


WINTER



Brush Cutting

winter stewardship activity

Brush removal, or brush cutting, is one of the most important stewardship activities. Many prairies, woodlands, and wetlands are overgrown with non-native trees and brush. In many oak woodlands, the brush (most often buckthorn or viburnum) is so dense that it is impossible to walk through.

It is the responsibility of the adults present to understand and lead children in appropriate use of tools: loppers and bow saws. These tools are sharp and need to be handled carefully. Children should always wear leather-palmed work gloves and receive clear directions, with a demonstration, before beginning to work. Absolutely no running with or without tools is permissible in the brush cutting area.

Using the Lopper:

Wearing work gloves, hold the lopper firmly by the rubber handles and briskly snap the cutting edges together. For best cutting results, the object to be cut should be halfway down the cutting jaws. Loppers will not cut thick stems or trees. A good rule to remember: if the object to be cut is thicker than a child's thumb, use a saw. Other guidelines:

- Do not twist the lopper if it will not cut the object. (You will damage the lopper).
- Do not put the lopper jaw into mud, snow, or water. (You will damage the lopper).

- Always cut 2–3 inches from the ground. Stumps that are left taller than this are tripping hazards.
- Do not try to cut an object if others are working very close to you.
- ALWAYS have a clear view of what you are going to cut.
- Carry the lopper in a closed position with the cutting jaws facing down. If not in use, the tools should be returned to a central location or to the adult leader.

Using the Bow Saw:

Bow saw usage should be demonstrated and carefully supervised until the adult leader is confident that the children are able to perform the activity. Grip the bow saw firmly by the metal guard and use the other hand to steady the object to be sawed. Push and pull the saw slowly until it “bites” (cuts) into the wood. Small children can use the bow saw in a two-person technique. As the “puller” pulls, the “pusher” guides the saw but does not put much pressure on the blade. This procedure is repeated as the other child pulls. As the blade bites into the wood, this rhythm of push-pull becomes more effective.

At times the blade may get stuck half-way through the cutting of a tree trunk. This is called “binding.” Instruct the children to ask for help when this happens, and NOT to twist

or tug at the bow saw. To remedy the situation, someone should push against the tree trunk to help widen the cut and release the blade. Gentle pressure may have to be continued until the cut is complete.

If the tree is large or has multiple trunks, it can be cut down in sections. ALWAYS be aware of where the children are, what they are cutting, and where the brush is at the end. Trees fall quickly and not always in the anticipated direction. Instruct students to call a warning BEFORE a tree starts to fall!

Constructing Brush Piles

Cut brush should be stacked into a brush pile, which is later burned by adult volunteers. Brush-pile building is an art that has a purpose. For efficient and safe burning, the pile can be up to 10 feet high and about 10 feet wide. Listed below are suggestions for building a quality brush pile. Because of safety concerns, adults should supervise the stacking of the brush pile. Children should not be allowed up on the brush pile.

Before dragging the tree over to the pile, children must cut the limbs and trunk into 5- to 7-foot lengths. Once the tree is cut into these lengths, the brush can be carried or dragged to the designated brush pile area. Branches that are sticking out at wild angles should be cut off for easier stacking.

An adult should stand on top of the brush pile. The weight of the stacker will help compact the brush. Control the pace of stacking by having each child hand the adult their brush. Assign a child to help hand the brush up to the stacker, and to patrol the perimeter of the pile and lop off branches sticking out at eye level. If the pile gets too big, a new one may need to be started. It is crucial to carefully select the site for the new brush pile. The pile should not be located on top of healthy prairie, woodland or wetland plants! Stack the brush in an area newly cut where there is not much growing on the ground. Be sure that the pile does not spread beyond the designated area.

