

News Column for use week of 2/1/2021
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Controlling Volunteer Trees

Trees are a vital part of our landscapes, but there are situations where trees need to be controlled. Volunteer trees often come up in the wrong place, whether that is in a pasture or your flowerbed. Sometimes control measures are needed to combat the spread of volunteer trees.

Volunteer trees can be difficult to control because some species resprout after cutting and some species will not resprout. Of the species that do not resprout, cutting is an effective control method. For example, eastern redcedar is a very common species that will not resprout after cutting. Some of those species that do resprout after cutting are Siberian elm, hackberry, Osage orange (hedge tree), oak, ash, aspen, cottonwood, maple, and sycamore, but these are just a few of the trees. If you are trying to eliminate any of these trees, they either need to be dug out or the stump will need to be treated with an herbicide after cutting.

When I say volunteer trees, I mean those that come up from a seed, not suckers that originate from the roots of an existing tree. The recommendations given in the remainder of this article are designed to kill volunteer trees, not suckers. Using herbicides on suckers will damage and possibly kill the original tree. Trees that commonly produce suckers include honeylocust, black locust, hackberry, crabapple, and cottonwood. It is also possible for larger trees of the same species to become root-grafted. Even though root-grafted trees are not suckers, they do share materials between the individual root systems and therefore herbicides used to treat one tree can be passed along to its neighbor.

Say you have a tree that you want to control that is a volunteer and there is no other tree of the same species close enough to be root-grafted, what should be done? Well, if the tree is too large to be dug out and moved, then you should cut the tree down and use a herbicide on the cut stump.

The next question is what herbicide should be used on the stump. Triclopyr and glyphosate are the herbicides most commonly available to homeowners. Triclopyr is found in many brush killers and glyphosate is found in Roundup as well as numerous other products. Read the label before purchasing to make sure that a cut stump treatment is listed.

Most often the undiluted product is applied to the stump immediately after cutting. A paintbrush is often used for the application if the stump is close to other plant material. The stump must be treated immediately or at least within five minutes of being cut.

Trees do not need to be actively growing to be controlled. This time of year is good time to treat as long as the applications are made when the temperature is above freezing. If you have any questions feel free to stop by or contact me in the Washington office by calling 785-325-2121 or emailing khatesohl@ksu.edu.

