



TEXAS A&M FOREST SERVICE

Central Texas: Brush Management

Brush is a general term for woody shrubs and trees which are out of place, given the landowners objectives.

In Central Texas, landowners are most commonly referring to types of juniper (aka “cedar”), mesquite, prickly pear, and occasionally scrub oak. Historical accounts show that issues with brush and attempts at managing this brush have occurred in Texas since European-settlement in the 1800’s. Prior to that, fire and buffalo herds often kept brush confined to particular areas in a landscape.

Identify Objectives and Inventory Woody Species:

The first step in managing brush is to be clear of your land objectives. Depending upon your goals and knowledge of plant uses, brush may quickly become a “visual screen” or “wildlife cover.” After gaining knowledge about your land objectives, it may be time to assess each woody species and determine where and how it should be decreased or managed. Remember that you don’t have to clear it all to be successful. Any brush management is best done in phases. You will learn something nearly every time you clear or thin an area, and mistakes are hard to take back.



Methods of Control:

There are usually several ways to control brush. Using a multi-method approach will usually get the best results.



Mechanical: For mesquite and red-berry juniper, grubbing with a back hoe or specialized dozer blade is the preferred way to kill the brush. Grubbing involves lifting the root crown above the ground.

For juniper (Ashe juniper or eastern redcedar), equipment can simply remove all green limbs and the brush will die. This can be done with bobcat shears, hydro-axe grinder, or dozer blade.

Keep soil disturbance to a minimum! Soil erosion can be devastating until grasses reestablish. Rocks can also be brought to the surface causing future management problems. It is also beneficial to protect hardwoods which could benefit your management objectives.

Chemical: Generally used on smaller juniper and mesquite, follow label directions to avoid harming yourself or desirable plants when using herbicides for chemical brush control. Contact experts and review expert material such

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as Brush Busters <http://texnat.tamu.edu/BrushBusters/> or Texas A&M AgriLife Extension publication B-1466 for a more extensive list of range species and how to control them.



Fire / Prescribed Burn: This is nature's brush control method, and it can improve range and forest health when used in conjunction with other conservation practices. Prescribed fire can be very effective and cost efficient on juniper under five feet tall. It is important to contact experts and develop a burn plan before considering using fire as a management tool.

Goats: It is possible to clear small juniper and other woody brush with goats, although this is not a preferred method. Goats will generally eat everything else first before consuming juniper. This method should only be used December - February when juniper is the only green plant in the pasture. Consult the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service for more information.

Manage Leftover Debris:

Leftover debris can be substantial. Management of this debris should reflect your land objectives. Burning brush should only be performed with knowledge and under extreme caution. Have equipment on hand to control spot fires and never leave a burning pile unattended. Some brush debris can be used as bird and reptile cover, as a deer enclosure around hardwood regeneration, or to slow down water on slopes.

Prevent Brush:

Managing livestock with proper stocking levels can help prevent brush encroachment. Tall, thick, healthy grasses will often out-compete woody seeds trying to sprout.

Prescribed fire can also be effective as brush prevention tool. This is especially true when grass is tall and healthy. Cool, winter burns usually do the trick. However, as you gain more experience, hotter, warm-season burns can also be helpful.

Focus on clearing small re-growth brush where the benefits are the greatest and the expenses are the least.

Remember Wildlife:

Brush has irreplaceable wildlife benefits when managed properly. Cover, edge-effect, and food are uses for brush. Brush benefits many kinds of birds, reptiles, and mammals. It is also important to research the endangered species in your area to see if brush management may impact their habitat.