

# Culling Trees to Add Sunlight

We are gradually clearing a 10 acre old field that has grown into trees over the past 40 years. We are more than halfway finished and keep working at it a little bit every year. We are about 10 years into this project. Our goal for the field is multipurpose for wildlife food plots, home gardening, an orchard, and a nut grove. Now that we have cleared about 5 1/2 acres we have quite of few things planted and realize our crops need more light to grow better. In our first photo we have cut several fir trees (that were planted as Christmas trees) and a couple ash trees. As you can see in the foreground of the photo, we cut the stumps very low so that our equipment can go over the stumps. In this case we have felled the trees on top of a food plot of Whitetail Institute Imperial Whitetail Oats Plus.



Letting More Light in on Food Plots!

More and more we are girdling trees a year or two ahead of when we intend to fell the trees. We girdle our trees by making a chainsaw around the circumference of the tree so that it cuts about a half inch into the sapwood. The depth of the cut depends on the thickness of the bark. Girdling trees has several benefits. The first is that the tree stops growing immediately. It may still live for one to three more years, but it will not grow significantly. Girdling severs the

cambium layer underneath the tree bark and prevents sugars from returning to the roots, where they turn into stored starches which provide energy for spring and summer leaves. Without this stored energy the tree will die. Once the tree has been girdled it gradually loses its leaves and begins to dry down. The dry wood in the dying tree makes it a storage place for dry firewood to be cut as needed. As the tree loses its leaves it starts to let light into the surrounding area. The girdled trees will die sooner if a labeled chemical application is applied to the girdling cut immediately after making the cut.



Previously Girdled Trees  
Ready to Cut

This year we had a neighbor who needed firewood and we were able to help them by letting them cut the trees that were previously girdled. When we agreed to let them have the trees we only asked that they cut the stumps flush with the ground and that they stack the limbs. The limb piles can be left for wildlife or burned to further clear the area.



## Opening Up the Field to More Sunlight

A significant portion of this area is used for deer food plots. Some of the best crops for food plots are sun loving perennials. Our field is surrounded by tall trees which cast long shadows in both the morning and afternoon. By clearing the remaining field edges we can increase the acreage that is exposed to sunlight most of the day. With the extra sunlight we can expand the types of crops that we can successfully grow.



Girdled Trees Ready for Cutting!

As new areas are cleared we can prepare the soil for cultivation. We can begin to control the perennial weeds and make applications of lime to raise the soil pH. Since we have a large forested area on our property the increased field area encourages a larger variety of wildlife. We can attract additional wildlife by leaving certain areas uncultivated and unmowed creating bird nesting areas.



Trees Removed!

In our old established orchard sunlight was having difficulty reaching the orchard because of some tall trees that had grown up over the years. By removing the trees, and creating more light penetration into the orchard, this will help with air flow, disease prevention, apple coloring, and tree growth. We intend to continue to remove trees and expand our field back to it's original size.



The Apple Orchard More Open to Sunlight!