

Brushing



LEARNING OUTCOMES

Trail clearing specifications

Aesthetics and safety of brushing

Access to trainings and JHAs for brush cutting, string trimming, mowing, if applicable

Know how for accessing information on sensitive plant populations

What is Brushing?

Brushing is cutting vegetation to allow the footpath to remain open.

Why does brushing matter?

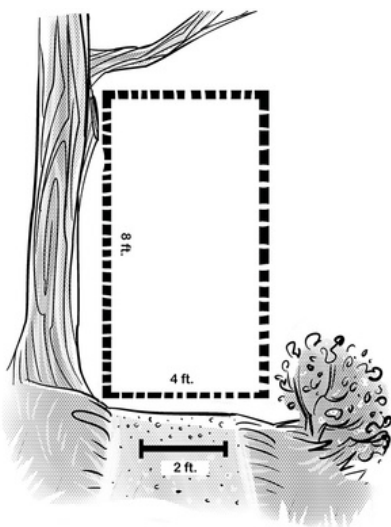
It improves hiker safety and resource protection by making the trail more obvious, more comfortable to travel, and puts hikers on the center of the trail. Plus, it reduces exposure to ticks.



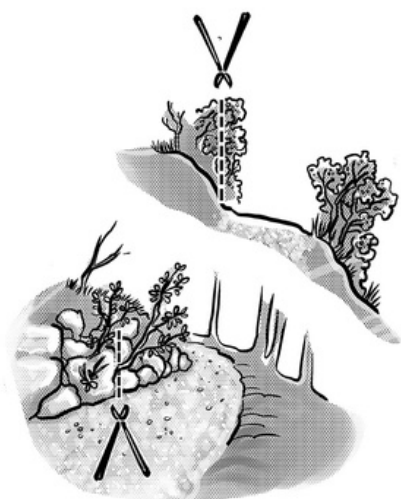
Trail Prism:

The standard prism for clearing vegetation is 4-feet wide by 8-feet high, provides a uniform character for the A.T. How many times a year the vegetation needs to be cleared will vary based on location.

Trail Prism



Brushing Annual Growth



What to Brush, Where:

On sidehill trail, brush to prevent larger woody plants from slowly encroaching into the trail while encouraging users to hike away from the outer edge. To do this, clear both woody and annual growth on the uphill side of the trail. Clear all woody growth on the downhill side of the trail but leave sufficient annual growth on the downhill side to encourage hikers to stay clear of the downhill edge, reducing the likelihood the trail will “creep” downhill.

On a section of trail without significant sideslope, grasses and fast-growing annual growth alongside trail should be cut back on both sides unless the area is prone to trail widening.

Make it Look Natural

After making your cuttings, clean up by moving cut material out of sight over large area to maintain the Trail's natural appearance and to keep the area free of obstacles for string trimmers and sling blades use. At a minimum, place cut ends of discard material facing away from the Trail so they are less noticeable to hikers.



Foundations of Brushing

As with most trail work, the goal is to make it seem as if you were never even there. Follow good pruning techniques to maintain health of woody growth.

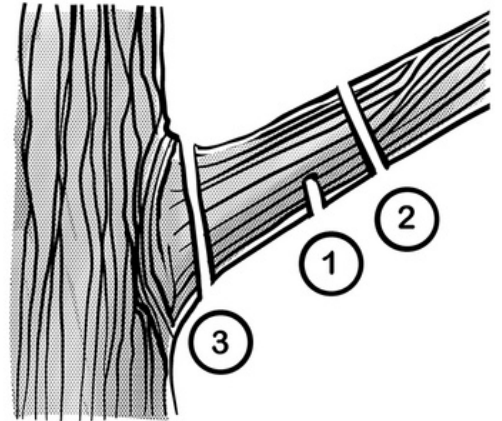
Brushing



Practice Good Pruning Techniques

Make Clean Cuts

Reduce injury to you, the tree, and the tool by avoiding twisting your loppers and bypass pruners as they cut. Dirt dulls loppers—so keep brushing loopers pristine and designate an older pair for work in/around dirt when necessary to cut out roots for other trail work.



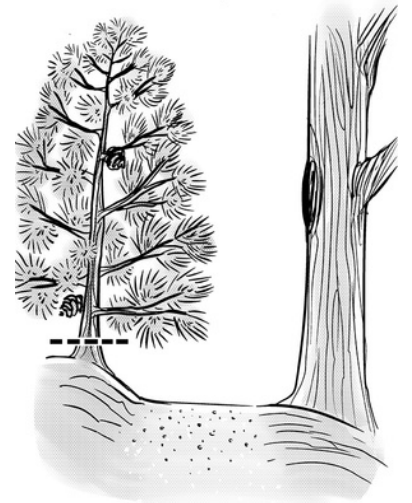
Do Not Leave Any Staubs

When removing limbs, cut the limb close to (but not on) the tree branch collar. This eliminates the danger posed by staubs (stubs of branches) as hooks and daggers, makes a nicer visual effect, and accelerates the tree healing.

Avoid removing all of the limbs from an entire single side of a tree that is too close to the trail anyway; instead, remove the whole tree.

Plan for the Tree Not the Sapling

It is tempting to leave saplings because they are cute, but pulling them when they are small is far easier than needing to cut them or all their branches that encroach on the trail later.



When removing saplings, cut as flush to the ground as possible with a horizontal cut so they don't puncture footwear, surprise a sitting hiker, or pierce a falling hiker. This also makes it easier to use string trimmers or swing blades in the area.

Blowdowns

Monitor: If you come across a downed tree or downed branch that is blocking the trail but is too large to move (a blowdown), take a variety of photos with something placed for scale and showing the blowdown across the trail as well as any parts extending off the trail. Include the location with your photos, such as GPS point, and report it for a certified sawyer to safely address.

Address, if possible: Consider removing limbs and branches to make the blowdown easier to navigate for hikers, but do so with care. Clearing a blowdown can be dangerous, regardless of its size, due not only to the equipment used, but also how the wood moves when cut. Branches under tension can whip when cut, causing injury. Only cut if the blowdown is stable. Carefully remove limbs and branches close to the trunk as possible and do not remove any branches that are supporting the weight of the blowdown.