

Frequently Asked Questions for property owners regarding removal
of *Prunus padus* and *Prunus virginiana* trees

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Please first read the Cooperative Extension Service publication cited in the footer; then see if your remaining questions are answered below. If they are not, please email us!

GENERAL

- So, as a homeowner, what are my options?

Your choices depend on the size and number of trees (or seedlings/saplings), the physical effort you want to expend, whether you are OK with herbicide use, and how much money you want to spend. You can do it entirely yourself if you can safely fell a tree, would enjoy the challenge of digging and using tools to pick/pry/chop the spreading roots from the ground, and can monitor the site for a few years for regrowth. Or you could leave it to a professional. Or infinite variations combining the two.

- Should I hire a professional to remove my *Prunus* trees or do it myself?

It is entirely up to you; it depends on what you are dealing with and how you want to remove it. A tree service could provide a cost estimate and some guidance. If you remove the trees yourself, you should consider how you will dispose of the trunk, branches, twigs, and cherries. You should also consider if you want the stump gone after the tree is gone and how you will remove that. You can do all this yourself, or you can hire a tree service to chip and remove the branches and twigs and/or remove the stump after you have cut the tree down. If you decide to do herbicide treatment yourself, you need to consider how much herbicide is needed and how to handle and store it. Unless you are treating a lot of trees, it is unlikely you will need anywhere near as much as is sold in even a small container. Storage and ultimate disposal of leftover herbicide are the user's responsibility.

- What does a tree service charge to remove a tree?

The charge depends on the size and number of trees, ease of access, proximity to obstacles (buildings, power lines), and how much work the property owner wants done. A typical range for cutting down a tree is \$400 to \$1000. This could entail: just cutting the tree down, cutting the tree down and removing all parts of it, or cutting the tree then cutting the trunk to firewood lengths and chipping and removing the smaller twigs. Additional costs would be stump removal (\$150 to \$300) or herbicide treatment of the stump (\$75 to \$150) to prevent regrowth.

- Can I use the tree for firewood? (with and without herbicide in it)

Any tree not treated with herbicide can be used for firewood (for example, the trunk of a tree removed before cut-stump herbicide treatment). Herbicide residues in treated trees have not been studied, but leaving the chipped tree on site should not be an issue. The only herbicide presently expected to be active in chipped material is aminopyralid (brand name Milestone), and that herbicide may only be used in forests rather than in yards where disposal might be an issue. To date there are no studies on how long an herbicide applied to chokecherry trees remains in the wood material. Such a study would need to be done for each application method and herbicide type. It might happen in the future, but there will always be some questions. It is best to not burn a tree that has been treated with herbicide.

- Can I just cut down the live tree and keep cutting the suckers? How long will it take to wear out the stump?

Yes, you can cut down the tree and keep cutting root suckers and resprouts from the trunk. This may be effective where the re-sprouting area is routinely mowed. We don't know how long it will take to starve the stump and root systems, and anytime that

you see green leaves on the resprouts, the tree is already replenishing its roots. It is not likely to be effective without a lot of persistent work. We have heard different outcomes using this approach and would like to hear of any experience you've had with this.

- If I cut the tree and dig out the big roots, will that get rid of my tree?

That will get rid of a lot of it, but the smaller roots that are left behind may resprout. You will need to monitor any of those areas for resprouts. We would welcome your feedback on any experience you've had with this.

- Do I need to remove all the twigs of the live tree I just cut down?

Branches and twigs can re-root themselves if given enough moisture and if covered by leaves, dirt or other organic materials. Removing the branches and twigs from a down tree will prevent that from happening, but those branches and twigs need to be disposed of properly or put in dry place and monitored until they are dry to be sure they do not reroot.

- Can I store the twigs on my driveway or a tarp until they are good-and-dead?

Yes, if you leave them in a dry place. Keep this out of reach of moose or other ungulates that might eat the twigs. A calf moose died from cyanide in the winter of 2010-2011 after eating twigs from a chokecherry tree that someone had left in a pile.

- What should be done with the cherries?

This also depends on the situation. If you cut the tree early in the summer, before the tree produces cherry seeds, you don't need to be concerned. If you cut later in the summer, you should ideally dispose of them all, however this isn't always practical and may not be that impactful anyway. Monitoring the area where the tree is removed and pulling the seedlings as they come up is an entirely acceptable way to handle the cherries. We estimate the cherries (seeds) are only viable for up to three years so monitoring will be limited. If the branches are not chipped or dried on-site, they should be disposed at

a facility that destroys them by chipping or burning, or contains them such as the landfill.

- Where can I dispose of the branches, twigs and cherries?

Several wood lots in the Municipality of Anchorage accept wood waste during the summer months. Contact these organizations for hours of operation, fees, and limitations, such as length or diameter of wood waste:

- Solid Waste Services has a wood lot at the Anchorage Regional Landfill in Eagle River. That woodlot will be open 9am-5pm, June 2nd – September 4th, 2023. Fridays and Saturdays will be free for residential customers.
- The Anchorage Fire Department manages wood lots in Girdwood and at 100th Avenue and C Street in Anchorage. Check their website; once they choose their opening dates, they will post the information there.
- Anchorage Sand and Gravel operates a disposal site at 8304 Sand Lake Road.

HERBICIDES

- What are examples of the herbicides recommended on the Cooperative Extension Service brochure, "Control of Invasive Chokecherry Trees"?

The Cooperative Extension Service can't recommend specific brands, and the brand names sometimes change from year to year. This does make it hard, however. You should read the label carefully and focus on (1) the active ingredients, (2) whether the application you're thinking of is on the label (e.g., stump killer versus foliar), and (3) the amount you would need for your particular situation. If you try to buy online rather than in town, you must be sure that the product is registered for use in Alaska.

- If I use more herbicide than the label recommends, will it kill my tree faster?

The rate on the label is not a recommendation; it is the law. If you apply more or less than the label's rate you are in violation of the law and that makes you liable for any contamination of water or impacts to other vegetation that might occur from the herbicide.

It is also a waste of money to use more than the label requires. We are finding that lower rates, within the range of rates on the label, are sometimes as effective as the higher rates.

- Could I harm adjacent vegetation if I use herbicide?

The short answer is yes. How much risk though depends on the application type and herbicide choice. Foliar applications present the most risk of damage to adjacent plants because herbicides are sprayed on the leaves, and the taller the trees targeted the more likely some herbicide will drift. There are directions on labels to help prevent drift, and foliar applications to trees less than three feet in height will help.

Several direct treatments are available that help reduce risk of damage to adjacent vegetation. Basal bark treatment are to date the only application type that has caused damage to plants adjacent to treated chokecherry. However, the damage is generally slight. Further, when non-target damage occurs after basal bark treatment it is usually from the use of products containing aminopyralid which is toxic to plants at low doses, but is of really low toxicity to other organisms.

The Cooperative Extension Service and professional tree service resources could be of assistance to you; they could provide the information you need and/or provide the services. It is better to err on the side of caution to reduce the risk of you causing problems on your own property and also the risk if anything happens to a neighboring property that could result in legal issues.

- Should I girdle my tree when I use the frill treatment?

No, make the incisions into the tree as indicated on the label. The inner layers of the bark transport water and sugars throughout the tree. Girdling the tree stops the flow of materials between the leaves and the roots. Herbicide relies on the transport system of the tree to spread it to all parts, killing both the roots and the leaves. In a frill treatment, you only need to cut about ¼-½ inch deep to get the herbicide into the inner bark layer.

- Do you recommend certain seasons for different herbicide treatments?

The time of season to apply depends on the application type and product. Always follow the instructions for application timing that are present on the product label. Basal bark treatments have the largest application window because they can be applied to dormant trees as long as there is no snow on the ground. Other direct treatments such as cut stump, and frill need to be applied to actively growing trees, and in the fall before a tree is dormant.

Foliar applications should be done when the tree is fully leafed out and before leaves change color. It is advisable to avoid application in the spring, and through the middle of July, to ensure you are not treating a tree that a bird is nesting in.

- If I have my tree killed by frilling and treating with herbicide, will it hurt nesting birds or birds feeding on the cherries?

No, the herbicide will not hurt anything that is nesting in the tree. There is a chance that the resulting defoliation will make the bird nest more visible to predators. Nesting generally ends mid-July; if there might be bird nests, it is best to wait till after that date to do any management.

- What are the hazards if I use frill treatment and leave a dead tree standing?

The tree might fall when it begins to rot and lose strength. Dead standing trees are a natural part of the forest. If the tree is in a position that falling would cause it to damage property or injure someone, the tree should be cut down after it dies.

REPLACEMENT

- This tree is beautiful in the spring. What can I plant as a replacement that will be as nice?

Many factors affect the tree choice for any location. For example, consider whether the tree might outgrow the area, hit powerlines, buckle driveways, etc. Consider the drawbacks, for instance a tree that produces a lot of inedible fruit or a lot of catkins or pollen. Consider whether the tree is susceptible to certain insects or diseases, whether you will need to protect it from browsing moose, and what you want the tree to do, such as to serve as a wind or visual break, to attract wildlife, for edible fruit, or to provide striking fall foliage or spring flowers.

You should go to a local tree supplier, especially one with a lot of local knowledge of what works in the hardiness zones found in Anchorage. Ask them about the plants' invasiveness. A helpful website for tree selection specific to different regions in Alaska, including distinctions, limitations, and pictures, is <http://www.alaskaplants.org/> Other resources include the Community Forests website <https://forestry.alaska.gov/community/publications> and the Cooperative Extension Service website <https://forestry.alaska.gov/community/publications>.

Native species and their associations with pollinators can be found at <https://www.nwf.org/NativePlantFinder/>. The safest bet for not planting a tree that will become invasive in the future is to plant a species that is native to your area such as white spruce or paper birch.

FURTHER QUESTIONS

- I am still confused and undecided. Who can help me?

The Anchorage Soil and Water Conservation District wants to help and our capacity to do so will be growing. We may be able to talk through the options with you, loan you a tool for pulling out saplings, potentially help with herbicide application in the future, and possibly provide financial assistance.

Contact us at the email address below. For herbicide questions, contact the Cooperative Extension Service (info shown on their brochure). And please tell us what has or has not worked for you!

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