

Controlling Volunteer Trees

Volunteer trees can be a landscape mess. If they try to grow in the lawn, we can mow them off multiple times and they tend to go away. If in a landscape or windbreak, however, it's a different story. If transplanting them isn't a desirable option, the dormant season is often a good time for removal, but does require some understanding of how that tree is growing.

For starters, remember that most trees re-sprout after cutting. Redcedar is an exception, but most deciduous trees re-sprout unless cut repeatedly. Siberian elm, hackberry, ash, oak, and maple, for example, all re-sprout and will need to be dug out or the cut stump treated with herbicide after cutting.

Before using any herbicides, however, remember as well that true volunteer trees are those that come from seed, and not those that originate from the roots of an existing tree (suckers). The practices that work on volunteer trees are not always recommended for suckers, so knowing if you have a volunteer tree versus a sucker versus even a root grafted tree (that shares material between root systems) is important. Herbicides applied as a stump treatment to root grafted trees or suckers can result in death of the main tree. Only volunteer trees should be considered for any herbicide treatments.

If nuisance trees are one of your winter projects, start determining now what type of tree you are dealing with. A good control program is one that removes the volunteer tree, but doesn't harm the other desirable trees in the landscape.