

Girdling trees

One way to thin a forest to release desirable species is girdling trees. This means cutting through the bark of the tree to break the line of phloem cells. Once this line is broken, food made by leaves through photosynthesis cannot be transported to the roots. It may take several years for the roots to use up their stored food, but after it is gone, the tree will die. If trees are cut down instead of girdled, the trees may stump sprout because the stored resources in the roots give the tree energy to send up new shoots. Given the chance, the stump sprouts can turn into large trees. Stump sprouts can be cut off, and if this is done enough times, the tree will stop sending up new sprouts. Cutting down trees and continuing to cut off the stump sprouts is an option for removing trees, but girdling trees is less labor intensive and is just as effective. To girdle a tree, make a cut all the way around the tree. This cut should be below the lowest branches of the tree and go just deep enough to get through the bark. An identical cut should be made a few inches below the first cut. The second cut is made to ensure that the tree does not heal and reopen the passageway for food to get to the roots. Girdling causes the tree to die over a period of many years, which is beneficial for the surrounding forest because the slow dying of the tree allows the understory species to adapt to the increased amount of light. If the tree was cut down, the change in light would not be gradual, so the understory plants would not have time to adapt. After the girdled trees die and fall down, they are left there for habitat.



MORE RESOURCES:

Girdling Trees

Sound Native Plants, Olympia, WA

<http://www.soundnativeplants.com/PDF/Girdling.pdf>

Controlling Undesirable Trees, Shrubs, and Vines in Your Woodland, F-45-97

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<http://ohioline.osu.edu/for-fact/0045.html>