



Critical period cutting

A HOW-TO GUIDE FOR REMOVING LARGE BUCKTHORN

Removing buckthorn can help diversify the plant community, reduce erosion and improve habitat. But it can be a daunting task for homeowners and land managers. The critical period cutting method uses what we know about how buckthorn grows to aid the process. Here are step-by-step instructions:

YEAR 1, LATE MAY OR EARLY JUNE

Cut and strip the main stem

Cut through the main stem 3-5 feet above the ground, then cut off any side branches and growth on the remaining stump.

Use a saw for the main stem. You may be able to strip side branches with loppers or pruners.

Without leaves, the buckthorn plant can't photosynthesize – its only method to replenish stored nutrients to resprout.



Use this method if:

- You're trying to remove buckthorn with stems greater than 2" in diameter
- You're working on a small natural area or home landscape
- You can't or don't want to use herbicides
- You can commit to following up for multiple years

Tools you'll need:

- Work gloves
- A saw (bowsaw, handsaw, chainsaw, etc.)
- Loppers or hand pruners
- Eye protection (recommended)

2

YEAR 1, MID-SEPTEMBER

Re-strip the stump until it's bare

Cut off, or "re-strip," any branches and new growth from the sides of the stump.

Re-stripping stresses the plant, exhausting its root reserves and preventing it from drawing down any additional nutrients it may have gained from leaves over the summer.



3

YEAR 2, LATE MAY OR EARLY JUNE

Re-strip the stump again

Cut off new growth again after the initial leaf-out in the spring, usually June.



4

YEAR 2, EARLY TO MID-SEPTEMBER

Re-strip the stump one more time

Do this final re-strip in mid-September or before leaf-drop in the fall.

5

YEAR 2, EARLY TO MID-SEPTEMBER

Remove the stump

Buckthorn is relatively shallow-rooted; when the plant has died, try pushing the stump over. Tamp down soil and leaf litter to limit exposed soil.



WHAT TO DO WITH CUT BUCKTHORN:

Check if you can dispose of it in city yard waste; use it as firewood; scatter or pile it onsite to let it decay. Be careful not to spread its berries!

6

YEAR 2 AND ON

Plant native species and pull new buckthorn seedlings

Follow-up is key! Diverse native plants compete with buckthorn seedlings, so planting or seeding for habitat has another benefit.



MORE DETAILS AND INFO:

fmr.org/CPC