

Maintenance and Care of Tree/Shrub Planting

To help ensure the survival of your newly planted trees and shrubs, it is recommended that you scout your planting for unwanted vegetation. Unwanted vegetation competes with trees for moisture, nutrients, and growing space. When maintenance is necessary, a number of options are available for controlling unwanted competition. These options include mowing, cultivation (hand or mechanical), mulching (natural or synthetic materials), or the use of herbicides. Often times, a combination of control methods works the best.

When cultivation and/or mowing is done, we have found that it's important to mark rows with lath or flagging. Mowing of thistles is best done at the first sign of flower development and mowing may be required twice during the growing season to properly control thistles. One major drawback of mowing is that the thistles between trees within the row will not be controlled. When grasses have overtopped trees (cannot see the tops of trees from above) it is helpful to mow between rows, however, when mowing a cover crop of Timothy or perennial Rye Grass, moisture is actually taken away from the trees by encouraging these grasses to continue growing. Timothy and Rye, left unmowed, will normally go dormant by July and quit using water. Spot mowing is possible when the problem area(s) are isolated.

Spraying Transline is a very effective alternative to mowing for thistle control. Spraying thistles before they are in the bud stage reduces the amount of Transline needed. A number of landowners are using sprayers on ATV's to spot spray. Transline is also effective in removing alfalfa and ragweed from a planting. A late fall band application of Simazine (trade name Princep) over tree rows is effective in controlling heavy quackgrass or other grasses that threaten to smother trees. Consult your forester or conservationist before applying Simazine. It is important to follow label directions when using any herbicide whether applying it over the entire planting, band spraying, or spot spraying.

Additional options for ongoing weed control include the use of synthetic weed barrier (found in rolls or squares) or organic mulches (wood chips, grass clippings, etc.). Use caution when mulching with straw or grass clippings, because of the potential of attracting over-wintering rodents. As mentioned earlier, mechanical cultivation can be very effective on perennial weeds when done with diligence and done repeatedly. Cultivation does, however, promote germination of annual weeds. Cultivation doesn't solve the problem of within row weed control and should be used in combination with another method.

One final item needing to be addressed is- when is mowing between rows necessary or justified? Mowing can be justified when you either have a thistle problem or when the grass is so thick that you cannot readily see the trees/shrubs. A planting that has a good cover of Timothy grass established does not need to be mowed! Please contact the Becker Conservation Office or your DNR forester if you need additional information or with questions.