

Mowing and Cutting

Mowing and cutting employ mechanical or hand tools to sever the aboveground portion of a plant from its roots.



Mowing and cutting works best for ...

- Large, relatively flat and dry areas that can be mowed with few safety or equipment concerns.
- Preventing tall, erect biennial weed species such as mullein and teasel from setting seed when other control techniques are not feasible.
- Preventing the “tumbling” action of certain weed species such as diffuse knapweed, kochia, and Russian thistle that spreads seeds of these species across wide areas.
- Weakening weed plants by depleting root and rhizome reserves through repeated mowing, in cases where such mowing can be conducted efficiently.
- Combining with other control methods, such as herbicide treatment. Cutting can be extremely effective for killing certain trees and shrubs if it is combined with herbicide treatment of the cut stumps. For example, cutting the stems as close to the ground as possible in the fall and immediately (within 30 seconds) painting the cut stumps with triclopyr herbicide kills tamarisk, Russian olive, Siberian elm, and Crack willow.
- Large-scale restorations where weeds need to be controlled during the first growing season or two. In these situations, set the mower blade height relatively high so as to cut the taller weeds but to not cut the shorter, slower-growing desirable species.
- Relatively small areas where adequate labor is available.
- Small infestations of fleshy-stemmed biennial thistles are easy to cut with a sharp machete. These thistles include Scotch, Musk, Plumeless, and Bull thistles.



Mowing and cutting has limitations such as...

- Rarely killing weeds.
- Sites that are inaccessible or too rocky cannot be mowed, although weed whips and machetes can be effective in such situations.
- Having to repeat mowing frequently for control to be effective.
- Cut plants resprouting to larger sizes than prior to cutting (tamarisk, Russian olive).
- Weakening some rhizomatous plants only slightly (for example, Russian knapweed) unless the frequency of cutting is very high.

Pitfalls of Mowing and cutting include:

- Failing to remove and dispose of cut stems if they contain seeds.
- Dislodging rocks from the mower may be dangerous to the mower operator.
- Turning annual or biennial plants such as diffuse knapweed into short-lived perennials through repeated mowing.
- Weed seeds spread by mowing equipment to areas previously free of infestations. Clean equipment which has been used in weed infested areas before moving it to another area. Make sure that borrowed or rented equipment is free of weed seeds by inspecting equipment before it enters your property. Or you can insist that the equipment must be cleaned first.

Cost of Mowing and cutting:

- Can be relatively low per acre for large areas that can be mowed.
- Can be reduced if you can trade goods or services with a neighbor, especially if the neighbor is motivated by the prospect of reduced weed infestations on his or her property.
- A tractor with a brush hog rotary mower costs about \$80 per hour or about \$50 - \$75 per acre.
- A three-person crew with weed whips costs about \$30 per hour.
- Equipment cost for cutting is modest, with a weed whip, a chain saw and a double-action lopper costing about \$800 total.
- Labor costs can be a barrier to cutting large areas of weeds such as tamarisk or Russian olive.