

Trail Advocates

of the Clackamas River Ranger District of the Mount Hood National Forest

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Best Brush-Clearing Techniques?

Topic: Best Brush-Clearing Techniques?

Author: Tom Kloster

Topic Started: 7/7/2007; 8:54:37 PM

Last Posted: 7/17/2007; 4:41:54 PM

Best Brush-Clearing Techniques?

Tom Kloster : 7/7/2007; 7:54:37 PM

Reads: 183, Responses: 8 ([view responses to this item](#))

I've been working on restoring a lost trail outside the Clackamas (Vista Ridge, north of Mount Hood), and wanted to compare notes with folks here on the best way to attack huckleberry/false azalea/mountain ash that has basically covered the tread.

I've been using loppers, and it's very slow work unless you have a sizable work crew. It's also overkill for the small stuff. I've considered a machete, but figured I'll be more likely to chop my shins than the brush -- plus, it doesn't seem like the right tool for woody brush. I'm thinking of trying hedge shears, since that could make quicker work of the small stuff.

Any tricks of the trade for one/two/three trail tenders for brush clearing? Should I focus on simply recruiting a larger crew to speed this up?

-Tom

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Re: Best Brush-Clearing Techniques?**Robert Kosciak** : 7/9/2007; 7:10:37 AMReads: 192, Responses: 0 ([↩](#) view responses to this item)

Try using garden shears, they can cut a few plants at once. It IS slow work but at least the results will last a few years. You really have to triage - only cut what you really have to at first so the trail is followable. I've cut a million rhododendrons with loppers - they never go away!!!!

Good luck with the large crew, although you do know a few Gorge hikers...for me, a large crew is a couple surprised friends (trail work?!?!)

I have been enjoying the Portland Hikers site, very fun and informative. I would like to join you guys for some of that Gorge abandoned trail exploring, but probably not until September or so (it's going to be a busy summer, lonnnnng story)....

[Discuss this message.](#)**Re: Best Brush-Clearing Techniques?****Donovan** : 7/9/2007; 9:11:28 PMReads: 170, Responses: 2 ([↩](#) view responses to this item)

We lop the 1/2" plus stems and, if necessary, use a Sthil brush cutter with the three wing steel blade for the little stuff. But it is no use to use the machine until the larger stems are gone. The circular saw blade works real well for a few minutes because of rocks and dirt. Now is great time to get after it because it really sets it back. Autumn and Winter brushing is easier and useful, but seems to stimulate a vigorous comeback.

Brush pulls out of the slough fairly easily. Particularly Oregon Grape, small huckleberry, small trees, and ferns. Small Rhodie stems in or at treads edge are often connected to larger stems. I give them a yank and get rid of the larger stem. Same with Vine Maple. I am a lot more aggressive with brush than I was twelve years ago.

I have considered quality, very sharp, hedge shears also, but with 3' plus handles for leverage and fatigue, but I have not tried it yet.

Brushing, it appears to me, is a Zen activity testing patience, discipline, and stamina.

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Re: Best Brush-Clearing Techniques?**Tom Kloster** : 7/9/2007; 10:34:03 PMReads: 191, Responses: 1 ([↩](#) view responses to this item)

Thanks, Donovan and Robert - glad you suggested hedge shears. We were thinking about that on Saturday as we pushed through the huckleberry thickets. They looked small enough cut with shears (and fairly slow with hand clippers - very, very slow with loppers!).

On the trail in question, we did most of the heavy log clearing early in June (when it was still wet) and will resume after fire danger has subsided this Fall. So for now, it's brush. I most certainly agree on being merciless when clearing! In fact, our first pass through was with bow saws and loppers to remove a number of small evergreens that were growing in (or nearly in) the trail. I've learned that volunteer clipper crews can have a Bambi response about those little trees, not realizing how many get cleared regularly from their favorite trails!

But nobody seems to mind clipping back the brush... though I like the idea of a clipper ambush, Robert... very devious! :-)

Tom

[Discuss this message.](#)**Re: Best Brush-Clearing Techniques?****Robert Koscik** : 7/10/2007; 6:39:05 AMReads: 191, Responses: 0 ([↩](#) view responses to this item)

You can really get those shear-blades a flyin', like giving the trail a haircut. It seems to work well on brushy stuff, huckleberry bushes etc.

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Re: Best Brush-Clearing Techniques?

Simon Harding : 7/13/2007; 3:20:36 PM

Reads: 192, Responses: 3 ([view responses to this item](#))

There's some reference in this thread to being gentle in clearing trail. There's no place for that. Certainly not in Western Oregon. Rhodies and the other brush we encounter, including small trees (and sometimes large) understands only one thing: brute force.

Odds are, the trail you are working (pick one!) has not had real maintenance performed on it in years. Being timid does no one any favors. Leave a mark. Donovan can speak to what the USFS standards are. And use a critical eye next time you are on a well used trail, well maintained by the USFS or BLM, and look at the line of sight down the trail ahead. Note the brush cleared and trees cleared back from the trail to either side, leaving a natural line of sight down the trail.

And it might be some time before you or someone else inclined toward maintenance comes along. And brush grows quickly. So "get Medieval" on it. Because brush never sleeps. And your work will leave a slight impression, and soon be unnoticeable to the unpracticed eye.

Oh, and good luck getting the crunchy groovsters out of the hepster Portland coffee shops (Red and Black, Stumptown and Starbucks shelter numerous crunchies who talk big and do squat) and onto the trails for any real work. Be sure and let us know when they are good for more than a half day!

Simon

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Re: Best Brush-Clearing Techniques?**Robert Koscik** : 7/16/2007; 7:25:11 AMReads: 186, Responses: 0 ([↩ view responses to this item](#))

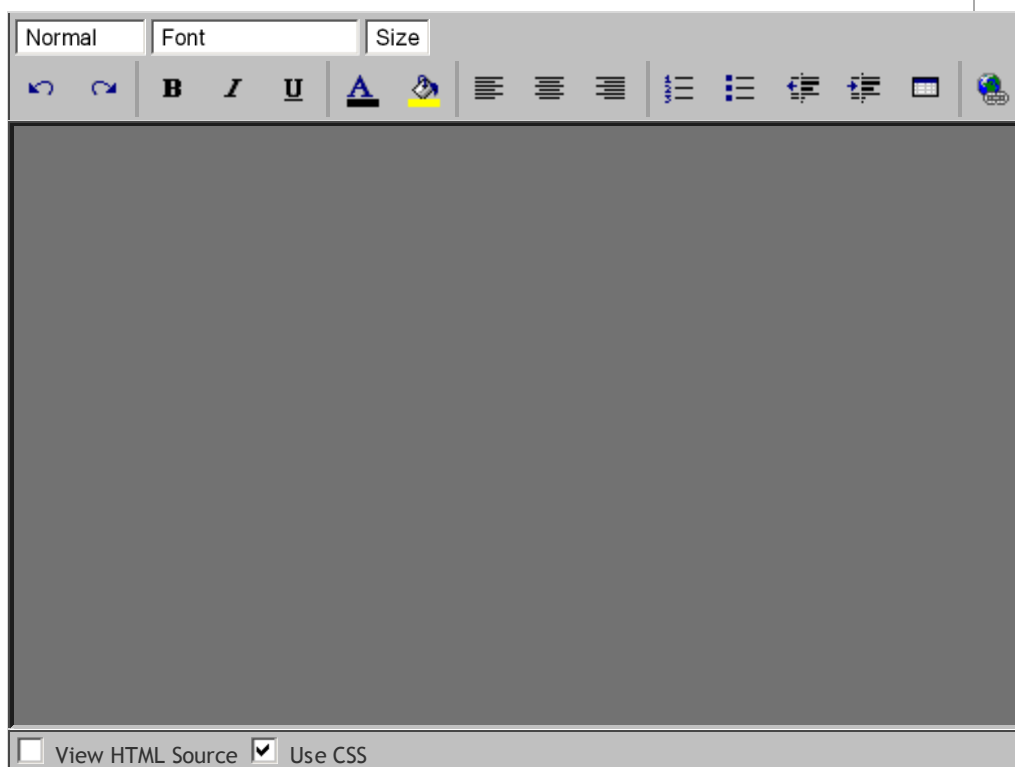
Ahh hell I'd say the vast majority of Portland folks don't even leave the city...a strange set of circumstances indeed.

[Discuss this message.](#)**Re: Best Brush-Clearing Techniques?****Karl Helser** : 7/16/2007; 3:30:59 PMReads: 183, Responses: 1 ([↩ view responses to this item](#))

Well said, Simon...!

[Discuss this message.](#)**Re: Best Brush-Clearing Techniques?****Simon Harding** : 7/17/2007; 3:41:54 PMReads: 207, Responses: 0 ([↩ view responses to this item](#))

Thanks! I had lots of practice growing up, on Blackberry vines and Tansy Ragwort!

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