

KILLING TREE STUMPS

Did you know that many tree stumps will not die - they just fade away. Stumps that will not die exist in many yards and gardens in our area. It just doesn't seem fair that when you go to all the trouble of cutting down a tree, often a big one, it should continue to plague you with its constant sprouting. This happens not only from the stump itself but also frequently from the extended root system. The guilty tree is most often a maple, cottonwood, Lombardy Poplar, Black Locust, Willow, Russian Olive, or Tree of Heaven.

Probably the most effective way to prevent this from happening in the first place is to girdle the tree. This is done while it's still standing and causes the tree to exhaust the stored up energy in its root system and die over a period of a year or so. The process is really quite simple. Cut a two inch wide ring all the way around the trunk so that the cambium and phloem layers are removed completely. To do this, your cut should go in at least one inch deeper than where the bark begins. The tree will continue to bring up water and nutrients to the top, but the food which it manufactures in its leaves will not be transmitted to its root system for storage and subsequent use. For example, a tree that is girdled now will still put on its leaves next spring; it should not be able to leaf out the following year. It will also lose the ability to sprout from the stump or roots.

Unfortunately, most of us lack the foresight or time to plan in this way, and trees are often cut down after an impromptu decision. Then the sprouting starts. What does one do? As soon as the tree is cut down, regardless of the season, it's important to act immediately. Simply paint a brush-killer type herbicide on the newly cut stump so a fair amount is on the ring of cambium all around the outside just under the bark. If the tree has been cut down for any length of time, you should re-cut the stump all the

way into live wood before applying the herbicide. The herbicide is absorbed and transferred to the roots where it should cause death. This may need to be done several times before the plant dies, but you should eventually get it. This procedure can be done any time of the year.

Suckers that keep coming up from the root system of a cut-down tree can also be treated with a brush killer. If the suckers come up in a lawn area, you'll have to spray them with an herbicide that will be absorbed by them but will not harm the grass. Sprouts coming up in an area where you don't need to be concerned with good plants can be treated with a non-selective "brush killer" herbicide which kills or damages all treated plants. This herbicide application to suckers is probably best done when they are in full leaf and actively growing.

Finally, if you don't want to use chemicals you can eventually kill the plant by continuing to cut the sprouts and suckers off. If you keep ahead of it, it will eventually exhaust its food reserves and die in much the same way as with girdling. However, with this method a very large tree may take over seven years to kill. Being constant with removal of the sprouts is the key.