



### **Prepare Planting Sites This Fall for Spring Success!**

When it comes to planting forest tree seedlings, the best time to plant is spring. This is because seedlings grown in forest nurseries need to finish their summer growth and then go dormant in the fall and winter months so they can be removed from their nursery beds and shipped to you safely. But, the time to start thinking about planting your seedlings next spring is now!

I don't know how many calls I receive each spring on how to control weeds in new forest plantings. But, they all pretty much go something like this. "I just finished planting my seedlings in an old field. What herbicide can I use to kill the weeds?"

Weed management in new tree plantings begins with proper site preparation the fall before planting. The objective is to provide new seedlings with a 3- to 5-foot vegetation-free area. This weed-free zone can either be a strip or circle.

If planting in perennial sod (like fescue), the most effective way to kill existing vegetation is with a contact herbicide. Fall applications will provide more consistent control than spring applications. An added benefit is that your planting rows, or spots, will already be "marked" come planting time. Control can be improved by mowing the area in late August or early September to eliminate existing foliage and treating the tender (and more susceptible) re-growth when at least 10" of new foliage is present.

Glyphosate (e.g., Roundup, Touchdown, many others) is the most effective contact herbicide for perennial sods. The recommended rate is dependent upon the type of vegetation (fescue, brome, bluegrass, etc.) and the particular formulation of the herbicide you apply. For tall fescue, the recommended Roundup rate is 2 quarts per treated acre.

I also recommend adding a second herbicide containing sulfometuron (e.g., Oust XP) alongside glyphosate to take care of any late-season grasses and broadleaf weeds. Sulfometuron has both pre- and post-emergent activity. As with glyphosate, make sure you carefully read the label as rates do vary depending upon where you live and what species you intend to plant. Here in the Midwest, the Oust XP label will allow fall application rates of 3 to 5 oz of product per treated acre on sites where northern red oak, white oak, ash (green or white), sweetgum or yellow-poplar are to be planted. These rates will also provide some pre-emergent control the following spring.

Remember that a treated acre is always smaller than an actual acre. This is because you are not treating a solid area; only the area around your trees. For example, planting trees on 10'x10' spacing will give you 435 trees per acre. If you plan to prepare a 4-ft-diameter circle around each tree, then your treated area is 1/8 acre [ $3.14(2\text{ ft})^2 = 12.56\text{ sq ft}$ ;  $12.56\text{ sq ft per tree (435 trees per acre)} = 5,464\text{ sq ft}$ ].

Sometimes weed control in new plantings cannot be started until the spring of the planting year. If it is begun early enough, before weeds have begun substantial growth, an application of a soil-applied herbicide at least two weeks before planting might get you out of your jam. For optimum tree growth, you may wish to respray dormant seedlings for the first 3 years following establishment.

But, spring weather conditions are usually dicey at best and the risk of damaging actively growing roots of freshly planted seedlings is high if you do not correctly apply the herbicide. So, your safest and surest bet is to prepare next year's planting sites this fall.

Make sure you read the herbicide label at least twice: before you purchase the product and again before you apply the herbicide.

Article by: Hank Stelzer, MU Extension Forester

Submitted by Peter Maki, Forestry Communication Specialist, Top of the Ozarks RC&D