

# Forest Site Preparation for Trees on Open Land

Alabama Guide Sheet No. AL 490



## Definition

Forest site preparation for trees on open land is the treating of cropland, pastureland, hayland, idle land, etc. to permit the establishment of trees. Controlling competition from weeds, grasses, and woody vegetation by site preparation will increase survival and tree growth. The type and intensity of site preparation will vary according to species, ground cover, and soils.

## Mechanical Methods

**Mowing** - A tractor drawn rotary mower may be used to remove herbaceous and small woody vegetation. This practice is usually used in conjunction with other site preparation practices. When band applications of herbicides are to be used, mowing may be in bands according to the spacing of rows. A six or eight foot mower width is the most desirable as the width of band spray applications of herbicides are generally four to six feet. Mowing used in conjunction with herbicides for site preparation should be completed by July 30. This is necessary to obtain adequate re-growth of vegetation prior to applying herbicides.

**Disking** - This type of site preparation turns the soil, which removes competition and exposes roots. Disking should be on the contour and should be used only on gentle slopes.

**Subsoiling** - Subsoiling is used to break compacted soil layers that restrict root growth. Subsoiling should be done to depths of 18 to 24 inches. Subsoiling should be applied on the contour on sloping land and should conform to the planned row spacing. Subsoiling for hardwood tree planting on flat land may run in two directions so that the intersection would be the spot

where the tree would be planted. Subsoiling should be applied two to three months before tree planting when soils are dry.

## Prescribed Burning

Prescribed burning may be used to remove flammable woody and herbaceous vegetation. Prescribed burning may be used in combination with other site preparation practices. Burning should be performed by a certified prescribed burner. All local and state laws should be followed.

## Herbicides

Herbicides may be either broadcast or applied in bands, and may be used in combination with other methods of site preparation. Herbicides used for site preparation should be applied in late summer or early fall. The type of herbicide application will depend on the type of tree species to be established and tree planting objectives. The kind of herbicide to use will depend on the species of vegetation to be controlled. Tank mixtures of different herbicides may give better results than a single herbicide. Contact your local office of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Alabama Forestry Commission or a herbicide company representative for specific recommendations. Always follow label recommendations for rates and usage.

## References

USDA-NRCS AL Conservation Standard Code 490 - Forest Site Preparation. January 1999.

USDA-NRCS AL Conservation Standard Code 338 - Prescribed Burning. January 1999.