

News Column
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CEDAR TREE CONTROL

It was a sound that would trigger warm thoughts and a feeling of tranquility on a cold winter evening when the wind was whistling outside, and snow was drifting in the driveway. Everyone loves a fire on a cold winter night.

But it wasn't cold, and it wasn't winter. Yet, there was a faint crackling sound that heightened my senses as I welded on small project in the back yard. My face was covered by my welding helmet and my focus was on the two pieces of metal I was trying to stitch together. But that crackling sound — it sounded like....fire!

I first looked down at my feet, because it wouldn't have been the first time for me to set the dried grass on fire right under my work site, warming my boots and singing my blue jeans.

Nothing there.

By now – probably just three seconds later – that faint crackling I heard while my head was buried inside my welding helmet was already a loud crackling, just a couple of notches below the sound of a roaring fire. The sound led my eyes to my windbreak 30 feet away where a nice fire had started in the corn leaves that had blown in last fall.

Panic!

I looked to my right, where there was a hydrant about 50 feet away, but no hose and no bucket. I looked to my left hoping to see a shovel or rake, but I had put those away in the shed where they belonged. So I ran to the windbreak and tried stomping the fire out. Then I tried

kicking the fire out from under the tree limbs and into the open grass area so it wouldn't set a big cedar tree on fire.

The fire seemed to be more than I could drag out with my feet, and I was having trouble getting to the back side of the tree because of the other trees butting up against it, so I ran for a hose. In my mind that cedar was going to explode in flames any second, then the whole windbreak would ignite, and I would have 20 years of tree growth gone in seconds.

So, I ran just as fast as this old, fat guy can run to get a hose from the back of the house.

By now you can guess that I was able to douse the fire before my windbreak exploded in flames,... because you haven't seen my name in the newspaper headlines, and because I am telling the story now. If I had lost my windbreak I would have been too embarrassed to write about it.

I learned two lessons that day. First, I learned that sparks from a chop saw will travel 30 feet on a calm day. And the second lesson I learned is that big cedar trees are harder to set on fire than you might think. If you have ever burned a pasture and missed killing the big cedar right in the path of your fire, you know what I'm saying.

The same fire would have wiped out every tree I had if they were just 12 to 18 inches tall, and would have done some serious damage to trees three feet tall. Bigger trees are harder to kill with fire though, and today I am thankful for that.

We control small cedar trees in pastures every spring with our prescribed burns. Because bigger cedars are harder to kill with fire, burning at least every three to four years is recommended for cedar tree control.

Cedar trees are the easiest trees to control in pastures because cedars won't grow back if they are clipped below the bottom branch. No chemicals are necessary to prevent regrowth of

cedars – they won't grow back if you cut them below the lowest branch.

Most other trees will require a herbicide application to prevent regrowth. Recommended herbicides can be found in K-State's 2023 Chemical Weed Control book, available online at <https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/SRP1176.pdf>, or free of charge at the Extension Office.

If you have questions you can reach me at the Riley County Extension Office at 785/537-6350. Or, you can send e-mail to gmcclure@ksu.edu.

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