



Farming with ATVs: Use Them to Battle Weeds

When it comes to all-terrain farming, ATVs can get in the battle to get of weeds.

By Jim Ruen (continued from All-terrain Farming, Page 4 of 5)

ATV Debate

Is it an ATV a toy or a tool? By early summer, the oats were ripe, and oak, walnut and ash seedlings were off to a good start.

Unfortunately, so were giant ragweeds, which the state forester warned could affect tree growth. The problem was how to take out the 7- to 9-foot-tall weeds without damaging the seedlings. If possible, I wanted to delay the use of chemical weed control. I knew that even tolerant species were often set back by herbicides.

Sheldon Kinneberg, a local metal artisan, spot welded an 8-foot long, 1-inch angle iron and a matching length of 2-inch wide, 1/4-inch thick steel. I ground the edge sharp and bolted it to the front of my loader.

Back in the field, I plowed through the ragweed at 18 to 20 mph, using this steel bar to slice through the 1- to 2-inch diameter stalks and, at the same time, scattering ripe oat grains as I went.

While I knocked down the giant ragweeds, I also knocked down most of the oats and released a fresh crop of broadleaf weeds. In addition, the giant ragweed sprouted anew from their base.

The forester recommended an application of Transline, a broadleaf herbicide from Dow AgroSciences that has minimal impact on hardwood trees.

I borrowed a 1950s vintage Ford Jubilee tractor with a trailing sprayer. A single application did the trick for the most troublesome weeds, such as ragweed and thistle. However, it did nothing for an even more pernicious problem, young cottonwood and box elder that had self-seeded. The forester had warned that these trees, if left to grow, would quickly out-compete the slower-growing oak, walnut and ash.

"You'll satisfy the CRP (Conservation Reserve Program) requirements of tree cover, but you won't have the hardwood trees you want," he advised.

A dormant application of Dow AgroScience's Garlon 4 would do the trick but had the potential to damage the desirable oaks and walnuts if misapplied. I decided to opt for the more labor-intensive, non-chemical approach. With literally thousands of trees in the field and a goal of 40 to 50 per acre, the forester suggested identifying small clumps of desirable tree seedlings and mowing around them. Then, he suggested, I could use a powered trimmer to take out the cottonwood and box elder growing among the desirable clumps.

The rough-cut mower moved up in priority, and I ordered one. It will be put to use this spring to help control not only the cottonwood and box elder but also the emerging weeds and field-edge brambles. I'm also looking forward to maintaining some hiking and riding paths through my wooded areas.

I'm confident that for years to come, my "little tractor" will do the job for me. It's proven to be an excellent investment and one I would make again. It handles most of the work I need done around the home site and on my farmland. Best of all, when the work is finished, I can slip off the loader and take a ride just for fun.

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Jim Ruen is a freelance writer and tree-farmer in-training in southeastern Minnesota. He lives and gardens on a 3.3-acre wooded lot and works another 120 acres of woods, fields and streams a few miles away.

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