



Got a Chainsaw? Get a File, and Keep It Clean!

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My brother Ed doesn't fool around when it comes to the farmstead where he and his family spend free weekends.

If there is a chore to tackle, he hits it hard, especially when one of his adult sons is available to help. This past week he and his son Chris were hard at it, cutting cedar trees with a chainsaw.

In our part of Minnesota, the Eastern Cedar is an invasive weed. Unchecked, it transforms a pasture to a scraggly forest in only a few years. Ed and Chris were attempting to reverse the tide.

A few days later at a family party he asked me why chainsaw cutting chains get dull so fast. "I bought a new one, and it was dull in no time," he complained. "We had only cut about 50 trees, and I had to change it."

"Did you get it in the dirt?" interjected our older brother Charles. One of the full-time farmers in the family, he has plenty of experience with chainsaws and cedars.

"Well, yeah," admitted Ed.

"Did you sharpen it when it stopped cutting easily? I asked.

"Sharpen it? asked Ed.

Brother Ed had violated two key rules to chainsaw work. They are to never let the blade get in dirt or other debris and to stop and sharpen the cutting chain or replace it when it starts to cut hard.

Okay, I break those two rules all too often myself and so do most of us, if the truth be known. That doesn't mean we shouldn't try not to. If you keep your cutting chain out of the dirt and clean, it will last longer.

When it stops pulling itself through the wood and you have to push into the cut, when the discharge is dust instead of chips and when the chain looks shiny (chrome has worn away exposing steel), it is time to sharpen or replace.

That doesn't mean you have to break out a file and begin honing the teeth there in the woods. I know professional woodcutters who never use a file in the woods. However, they do keep extra cutting chains with them and swap out sharp for dull.

So keep your cutting chain clean and sharp. It is easier on you and the saw. It is also safer.

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