

Black locust control in natural areas

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Black locust is an aggressive tree that can quickly take over grasslands and is a problem for many landowners in southwest Iowa. Black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) is a medium-sized hardwood tree native to the eastern United States. The tree has attractive flowers and foliage which led to it being cultivated and planted for landscaping, allowing it to escape and spread throughout the country. Black locust can create fast-growing colonies that can completely take over natural areas in just a few years.

You can recognize black locust by its compound leaves and stout spines. The leaves are compound with 7 up to 21 leaflets on both sides of the long, central leaf stalk, with a single leaflet at the tip. The leaflets are large, measuring an inch long or more. The more noticeable feature of black locust, however, are its sharp spines. The tree will have many sets of paired spines along its woody stems. The spines are short and stout, usually not longer than an inch. Black locust is most often confused with honey locust, a tree native to Iowa. Honey locust leaves will be twice compound (the leaf stalk will branch twice and have leaflets on all) and the spines will be much longer than black locust, measuring 3 or more inches long.

Black locust trees are best controlled with basal bark herbicide application. Because of its incredible ability resprout after injury, cutting or burning alone are largely ineffective in controlling black locust. Instead, control target trees by applying a band of herbicide around the main plant stem, just above the ground. The band should be all the way around the stem and be at least twice as high as the stem is wide. The most used herbicide is a triclopyr product mixed with diesel fuel as a penetrant, although other brush killing herbicides can be used. The timing of this treatment is best while the plant is actively growing, between July and November. Be sure to always follow the product label and be as targeted as you can with your application, as overspray may harm the environment or adjacent vegetation. Basal bark treatment minimizes resprouts and has a high effectiveness on young black locust trees with a diameter of 6 inches or less.

Repeat monitoring and treatment will be needed to successfully control black locust. It's important to evaluate the effectiveness of your treatments and adjust as necessary. Treatment of dense colonies or large individuals in woodlands may take multiple years to fully control. Patience with targeted herbicide application and persistence in monitoring and retreatment are key to controlling black locust in your natural areas.

Attached image Black_Locust_1280px

Invasive black locust can quickly take over natural areas if not managed properly. Photo by Katja Schulz via Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic license.