

Weed Information Sheet:

boxelder

Acer negundo

Identification:

Sapindaceae (Soapberry family)

Abundant Perennial tree, deciduous **Height:** **Width:** **Leaf Arrangement:** opposite
Flower: Maroon, Green **Blooms:** **Fruit:** Samara **Fall Color:**

Boxelder is an awkward tree, often leaning, crooked and broken. They are fast growing, but short-lived, and so rarely have trunks more than 16" in diameter. Leaves and branches are arranged opposite of each other on the stem. The bark is gray to light brown, with shallow interlacing ridges. Each leaf is composed of three leaflets that are irregularly toothed. The leaves resemble those of poison ivy in that the outer leaflets have a pointed mitten shape with "thumbs" and the middle leaflet has a 'thumb' on each side of the leaflet. The twigs have a green to purplish green color and have a glaucous, wax-like film that rubs off when touched. This last feature will differentiate it from just about any other tree in our region, even in the winter. Seeds are similar to other maples with the common helicopter-like samaras. They often hang onto the female trees well into winter.



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AKA: Manitoba maple



Description & Impact:

Boxelder is a native tree closely related to other maple species. Though it naturally grows in riparian corridors and floodplain forests, it is an opportunistic species that quickly colonizes upland habitats in the absence of wildland fires. It is not a “natural” component of oak woodlands. Boxelder is a weak tree that is easily damaged by storms and has a relatively short life span, rarely living more than 40 years. Since this tree is so weak it has limited commercial value and can actually be a hazardous tree in a landscape setting. However, this fragile nature creates opportunities for wildlife woodpeckers, insects and cavity nesting birds. Boxelders can be found just about everywhere from their natural riverside habitat to old fields, urban waste areas and disturbed woodlands.

Control Methods:

Traditional: Cut the boxelder down and treat cut stumps with a concentrated formulation of glyphosate (Roundup®, etc.) or triclopyr (Garlon® 4 Tordon®, etc.) at the rate recommended on the label. Triclopyr can also be used for basal bark treatment for trees under 8” in diameter. Avoid treating in spring when sap is flowing up to the leaves. Always read herbicide labels carefully before use and always apply according to the instruction on the product label.

Critical Period Cutting: Box elders will vigorously resprout if they are simply cut down. A new technique to control invasive shrubs without herbicide is called critical period cutting. This involves cutting the plants multiple times, with the first cut being at roughly chest-height. This Initial cutting should be done in mid-May when the boxelder have fully leafed-out and the plant’s energy reserves are at their lowest. With this initial cut, also remove lower branches that contain leaves. Because boxelder resprouts so vigorously, for this species I recommend regular monitoring in that entire growing season for regrowth. As soon as new leaves fully emerge, strip the newly sprouting branches, which you may be able to do with your bare hands, or use pruners or a small saw. Repeat as necessary until root energy stores are exhausted and the boxelder fails to sprout again. Then you may cut the dead stump to ground level.

Hand-Pulling: For sapling, you can try cutting the root below the ground level with a Parsnip Predator or sharp shovel, or pull with the aid of a weed wrench. Consider the effects of soil disturbance and erosion when uprooting plants, especially on slopes (compared to the lower impacts of using cut-stump herbicide application).

Citations: <https://fmr.org/updates/conservation/how-and-when-use-critical-period-cutting-method-remove-invasive-buckthorn>