



# Help Your Preferred Trees Grow 8

## Select trees for wildlife, aesthetics, and products

### What does it mean to favor preferred trees?

Favoring preferred trees means selecting those with the greatest potential to accomplish your objectives for your backyard woods and giving them special treatment by removing the competition from adjacent trees. Trees with tops (crowns) touching are competing with each other. Roots for most tree species extend twice as wide as the crown, and most of the tree roots are in the top 18 inches of the soil. Tree crowns compete for sunlight and roots compete for moisture and nutrients.

Eliminating competition from other trees increases the light, moisture, and nutrients available to a preferred tree so it will be healthier and grow faster. The forest canopy will be more open after employing this technique and preferred trees will have more growth space. Favoring individual trees is analogous to a gardener tending a row of carrots. The goal is to produce carrots that

are large enough to eat. When the seeds are sown, many carrots germinate and become crowded and unable to grow rapidly. The gardener thins the carrots to provide ample light, moisture, and nutrients to the “keeper” carrots, so they will grow large.

### Why would I want to favor individual trees?

Favoring individual trees can help you accomplish multiple uses of your backyard woods, because individual trees can be selected to meet different objectives, such as protecting wildlife, enhancing the beauty of your woods, and producing income from the sale of wood or special forest products. A sugar maple provides attractive fall foliage, valuable wood products, and sap for maple syrup. An oak tree produces food for wildlife and boards for woodworking projects.

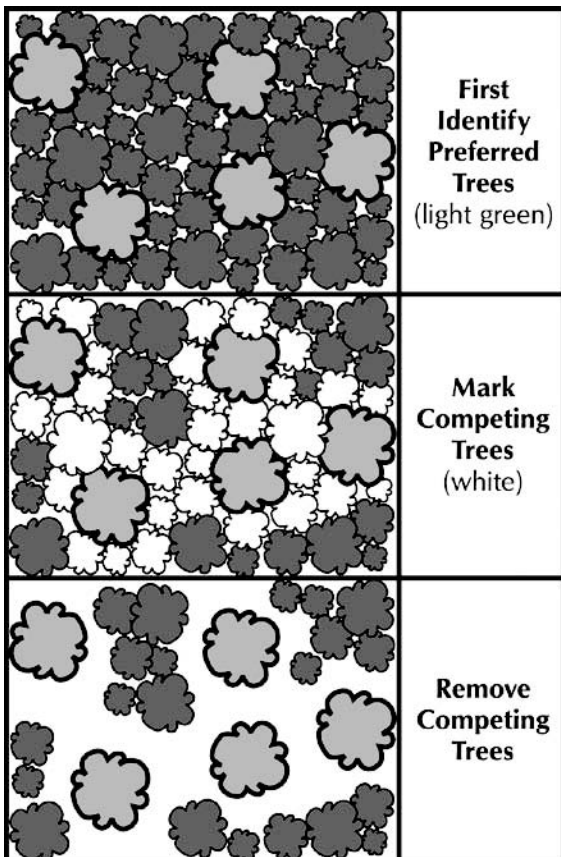
### Is my backyard woods suited to this technique?

If most trees are at least 25 feet tall, then your woods is probably a candidate for this technique. Usually when trees are this tall their crowns are touching. Often, this occurs in broadleaf trees when they are about 4 inches in diameter at a point 4.5 feet above the ground.

While this technique has been used mostly with broadleaf trees such as oak, maple, and ash, it also may be used with needleleaf trees such as pine, spruce, and fir. The variety of trees available in your woods will vary depending on your geographic location, available moisture and nutrients, and the actions of any previous landowners.

### How many preferred trees should I have?

The number of potential preferred trees depends on the climate, soil, species of trees, previous management activities, and—most importantly—the age of your woods. A woods with younger trees has many small trees, therefore more preferred trees can be selected than an older woods with fewer trees. The actual number of preferred trees to select depends on your objectives. Each preferred tree selected should help you reach at least one of your objectives.



Remove competing trees to give your preferred trees room to grow.

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The number of preferred trees also will impact the density of your woods. The more preferred trees you select the more competing trees you will cut. The amount of sunlight reaching the ground also increases with the number of trees cut, and the ground vegetation will grow faster. The combination of stems and branches from the cut trees and the increased growth of ground vegetation may make it harder to walk through a woods with many preferred trees.



All preferred trees should have healthy crowns.

To help you visualize how your woods will look after you remove competing trees, use brightly colored flagging to mark all preferred trees, and a different colored flagging to mark all the trees to be cut. Walk around to get an impression of how the area will look without the competing trees. Will this number of preferred trees meet your objectives?

If you decide that too many competing trees were marked, then you need to reduce the number of preferred trees you selected – don't just reduce the number of trees to be removed. This will ensure that the crowns of all preferred trees will be free from competition.

### **How do I select preferred trees?**

Criteria to guide your selection of preferred trees will depend on your objectives. (See the Backyard Woods

Tip Sheet on Make a Master Plan for more information.) Generally, you will be selecting preferred trees that are taller than or as tall as the competing trees and have healthy crowns. Species diversity should be considered in your criteria. Selecting only one or two tree species may make your woods more susceptible to pest outbreaks. (See the Backyard Woods Tip Sheet on Keep Your Woods Healthy for more information.) Also favoring species that are best adapted to the site should be considered. (Consult the USDA Forest Service Silvics Manual, available online at [www.na.fs.fed.us/spfo/pubs/silvics\\_manual/table\\_of\\_contents.htm](http://www.na.fs.fed.us/spfo/pubs/silvics_manual/table_of_contents.htm).) Frequently conflicts among the criteria will occur when selecting between two potential trees, but you need to make these tough decisions when selecting your preferred trees.

The decisions that you make will impact the next generation of trees in your woods. The trees that you keep will be the seed source for the next woods, and the density of the remaining trees will influence which seedlings will be able to survive to form the next woods.

### **How do I increase the value of wood products from my woods?**

In your backyard woods, even favoring just a few trees that have the potential for producing high-value products can be profitable. Eliminating competing trees can double the annual diameter growth of the preferred tree. The most valuable portion of the tree is the first 9 feet of the trunk. Select trees with no branches on at least the first 9 feet of the trunk, or prune these branches. (See the Backyard Woods Tip Sheet on Prune Your Trees for more information.) Form and lack of defects are important criteria to produce high-value wood products for the future. (See the Backyard Woods Tip Sheet on Generate Wood Products for more information.)

Besides the traditional timber products, you may consider managing for other forest products in your selection of preferred trees. Preferred trees may be selected for their fruit and nut production. Other trees may be favored for their bark, such as paper birch, that can be used for crafts. Other woodland plants can be encouraged to grow that can yield special products. (See the Backyard Woods Tip Sheets on Grow and Collect Special Forest Products for more information.)

### **How do I select trees to attract wildlife?**

Select trees that will produce food and shelter for the wildlife you desire. Open the canopy around these preferred trees to increase sunlight to the crowns. This will



