

LAND STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE

PRACTICES for CUTTING, MAINTAINING, and BLAZING TRAILS

These guidelines cover the proper cutting, maintenance and blazing of trails.

1. Clear the trail to a width of four feet, with a minimum width of three feet where terrain and vegetation dictate. It is preferable to remove limbs rather than the tree if three foot spacing can be maintained between trees. Clear the trail height to eight feet so branches will not block the trail when weighted with rain or snow. Cut the stumps of removed trees level with the ground for safety and appearance. Avoid cutting unusual flowers, ferns, or shrubs that border the trail.
2. Cut vegetation to be removed; do not pull up. Pulling up plants destabilizes the soil and disturbs the network of root structures of other plants as well, and all the little below-ground eco-systems. Later, as the roots of cut plants die and rot, they contribute organic matter to the soil, helping bind soil particles together and improving soil structure. Organic matter and good soil structure increase filtration of rainfall, decreasing runoff and ensuing erosion.
3. Cut all limbs, branches, or twigs growing more or less horizontally into the trail at the trunk of the tree, otherwise cut ends remain that can be dangerous to eyes. This approach will reduce the frequency of trail maintenance.
4. Cut slash resulting from cutting and pruning to six foot lengths, or less, and stack with stems aligned in the same direction and butts facing away from the trail. Limit stacks to a height of four feet. In this manner the stack will settle well and be esthetically pleasing. These stacks provide shelter for small animals, and will eventually decay back into the soil. Stacks may be placed fairly close to the trail, but sites should be chosen which are reasonably clear to begin with, so that living plants and trees are not damaged, and some concern for appearance should also be a part of the choice. Place stacks as far apart as possible, consistent with the amount of material in the stack and the difficulty of hauling the slash. For subsequent clearing of trails of deadwood, these same stacks can be used where feasible.
5. Remove all flagging tape used in laying out the trail after the trail is cut and blazed.
6. Trails are blazed with a painted, vertical rectangular blaze, 6" high by 2" wide. The blaze is placed typically 6 feet above ground. Oil-based paint is recommended as it can last up to 8 years whereas water based paint will fade and peel within 3 years. Try to place blazes on live trees that "strike the eye" at a suitable distance. Avoid placing blazes on both sides of the same tree as the loss of one tree will result in a twofold loss of marking. Try to maintain a consistent marking frequency with no more than one blaze visible at one time in either direction. Apply paint to dry, smooth surfaces and when the temperature is above 50 deg. F. On trees with thick, rough bark, prepare the surface with a hardwood floor scraper. Never cut through the bark as the tree will bleed.