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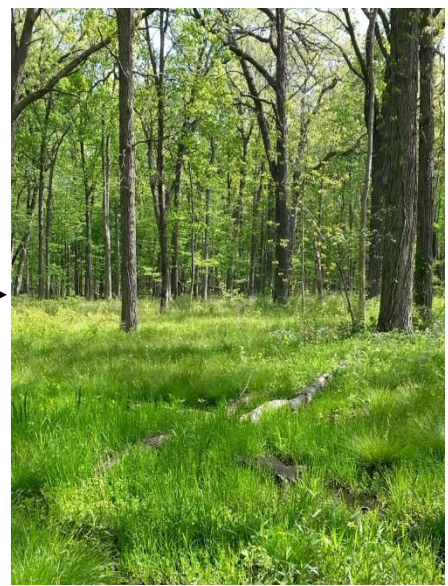
Woodland Stewardship - What to Expect

Healthy oak woodlands are beautiful; they provide places for rainwater to collect, filter and improve water quality, attract diverse wildlife and insect populations, and do not require typical maintenance such as mow, watering, and fertilizing.

Woodland stewardship requires a variety of ecological management tasks conducted over several years. There is canopy tree thinning, invasive shrub removal, native plant seeding, and prescribed burning. The process is worth it because there are few things as beautiful and ecologically beneficial as a healthy oak woodland. The following explanation provides you with an understanding of the process involved with woodland stewardship and what to expect.

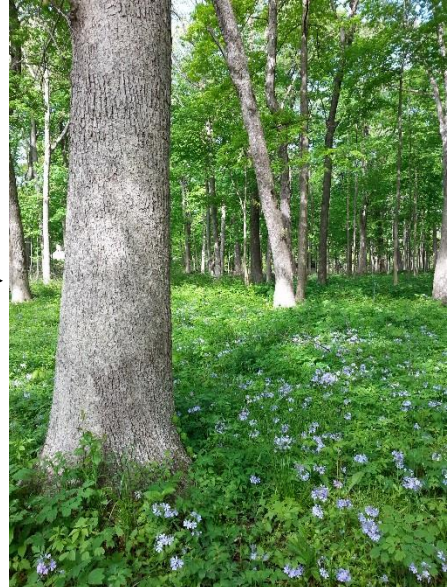
Canopy Tree Thinning

Sometimes tree species such as sugar maple, elm, and basswood become overabundant in an oak woodland and must be thinned to allow more light to reach the ground layer where many native grasses, sedges, and forbs grow. The ground layer is also where young oak seedlings grow and mature. The tree thinning process can seem a bit disruptive at first because large machines must be brought in to complete the work. Negative impacts to the oak woodland during tree thinning are minimized by doing the work in winter months when the ground is frozen.



Invasive Shrub Removal

Non-native shrubs such as buckthorn and honeysuckle are becoming more and more abundant in our oak woodlands. If not removed, they outcompete native shrubs and like some trees species, reduce light to the ground layer where native grasses, sedges, and forbs, and young oak seedlings live. Invasive shrub removal is typically done using hand tools such as saws and is fairly non-disruptive to the woodland. On occasion, forestry mowers are brought in to remove dense stands of invasive shrubs, especially when the area being cleared will need to be seeding or planted with native species.



Native Seeding

Woodland stewardship is not always complete following canopy tree thinning and/or invasive shrub removal. Often times the shade produced by a previously dense canopy of sugar maple or buckthorn over many years depletes the woodland ground layer seed bank and vegetation. Under these circumstances the woodland ground layer must be reseeded using a native woodland seed mixture that is developed by an Ecologist then purchased from specialized native plant nurseries. The seed is typically installed in spring or late fall and is sometimes done immediately following a prescribed burn. The native seed is slow growing and can take up to three years to establish.



Prescribed Burning

Last but certainly not least is prescribed burning, arguably the most important long term tool used in woodland stewardship. Fire was extremely common prior to European settlement nearly 150 years ago. Fire is vitally important to the woodland ecosystem because it removes layers of leaf litter, puts nutrients back into the soil, and keeps invasive shrubs and tree samplings under control so that oak trees (which can tolerate fire) regenerate. Prescribed burning can only be done by trained and certified personnel. It is safe and requires an Illinois EPA permit before implementing.



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