



Small Hand Tools for Forest Vegetation Management

5 tools recommended for forestland owners

Before you begin...

Owning forestland can be very rewarding. Landowners have a strong attachment to their forestland. They enjoy the plants and animals they encounter and they don't mind putting in the hours of work healthy forests require. But before you begin using a hand tool to tackle unruly vegetation, consider a few things...

Do you have a plan? A management plan outlines the goals a landowner has for their forestland and can be as simple as a prioritized list written by the landowner or as complex as a completed California Cooperative Forest Management Plan (CCFMP).

The [Forest Stewardship Series 2: A Forest Stewardship Framework](#) can help landowners with planning.

Different management goals require different vegetation management strategies. Each activity can require specific tools or permits, or are best used at certain times of the year. See the [Forest Stewardship Series 6: Forest Vegetation Management](#) for more details.

Consider 'scale'. Hand tools are not the best option for large-scale vegetation management. However, they can be effectively used on small-scale projects such as clearing vegetation around sensitive areas or important features, preparing land for prescribed fire, and in defensible space work.

Hand tools

Forest vegetation management activities can require different types of tools such as saws, axes, pruners, and loppers. Once you purchase a hand tool, a landowner should become familiar with how to safely and correctly use the tool and how to care for it. Refer to the manufacturer's instructions or speak with your local natural resource professional or retail tool provider. Remember, safety first!

Further Reading & Resources:

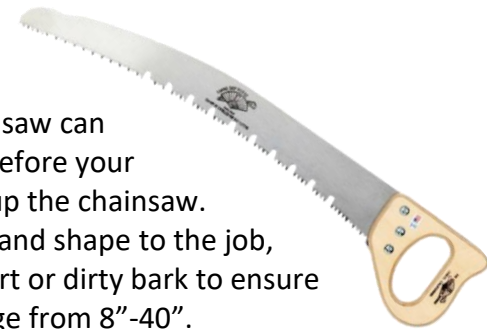
1. ['Top 10 tools for new forest landowners'](#), UC ANR Green Blog
2. There are many brick and mortar shops, as well as online retailers that specialize in forestry hand tools. Including:
 - a. Forestry Suppliers
<https://www.forestry-suppliers.com>
 - b. Pacforest Supply Company
<https://www.pacforest.com>
 - c. Sheldon Hill Arborist & Forestry Supply
<https://shforestrysupplies.com>

(Pricing guide: \$ = \$100 or under, \$\$ = \$101 to \$150, \$\$\$ = \$151 or more)

Removing Trees

Hand Saws – \$-\$\$\$

A good, sharp hand saw can down a small tree before your neighbor has fired up the chainsaw. Match the saw size and shape to the job, and avoid cutting dirt or dirty bark to ensure longevity. Sizes range from 8"-40".



Axes and Hatchets – \$-\$\$\$

Used to split and cut wood, or to debark a dirty log before sawing. Consists of an axe head with a handle. A good option when dirt and grit would dull a saw. For safety and storage purposes, a leather blade guard is recommended.



Pulaski-\$-\$\$\$

A combination axe and grub hoe used for chopping down small trees, splitting wood, cutting away roots and shrubs, and digging fire lines. A leather blade guard is recommended.



Clearing Brush

Brush Hook – \$-\$\$

Single or double-edged hook used for cutting through dense vegetation. Similar to a brush axe but with a longer handle for swinging through vegetation. A leather blade guard is recommended.



McLeod – \$-\$\$

A two-sided blade tool (rake with coarse tines on one side and flat hoe on the other side) used for clearing and raking vegetation, trail building, and constructing fire lines. Carry a file to keep the hoe side sharp.



“For pitching stuff in and raking things out [of a pile burn], you’re going to need a McLeod. And if you want to clear a brush pile, it’s heavy. And if [the McLeod] works really well for that.”-Brent, Nevada County

Weed Wrench – \$-\$\$\$

Upright tool used for removing smaller-sized invasive vegetation species. Serrated claws remove leaves and roots. Works best when the soil is moist.



“I have a lot of bay laurel and there’s a lot of saplings that come up and they re-sprout vigorously. You have to literally pull it out by the root...so I use a weed wrench, and that’s been a really valuable tool for me. It’s also good for Scotch Broom, anything that has a small diameter neck that you can clamp on to and leverage out.” -Sacha, Humboldt County

Pruning Plants/Reducing Ladder Fuels

Folding Hand Saw – \$-\$\$\$

Used for pruning tree limbs or removing small diameter trees. Models come in different teeth and extension sizes.



“My Japanese pruning saw... it cuts like butter! It can easily take down trees up to four inches in diameter. The Japanese-made tools, they’re smoother and sharper.” -Danica, Sonoma County

One and Two-Handed Lopper - \$-\$\$

Ideal for pruning tree limbs or thinning stands of small trees. Two-handed option can prevent fatigue.



Extendable Tree Pruner – \$-\$\$

Used for pruning small diameter tree branches and limbs through the use of an extendable pole, and a rotating and lockable cutting head. For a back-saving option, can also be used to lop small diameter stems at soil height.



Fire Tools

Wildland Fire Backpack Pump – \$\$-\$\$\$

Fire risk is best managed by paying attention to the weather and avoiding working with metal tools when sparks can catch. But if a fire starts in short dry grass, nothing quite helps you catch it like a backpack pump on standby.



Drip Torch – \$\$\$

Used to ignite burn piles of dead wood or to start a prescribed fire within established containment lines. A typical mix of fuel is 1 part gasoline (to increase ignitability) to 3 parts diesel.

