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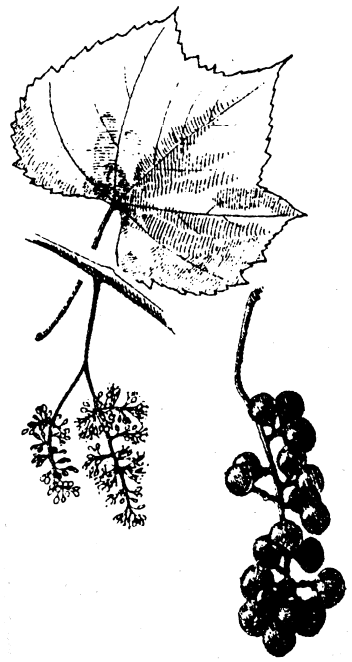
Dear Woodlander:

Grapevines were one for my favorite things as a kid playing in the woods. I especially liked them for swinging! Not only did they make decent swings, but also a refreshing drink of sweet water if cut in the early spring, when the sap was flowing.

An exceptional vine would last all afternoon, but for every good vine, I suspect we found 1 or 2 that just wouldn't hold-up. With a few tugs, the vine, along with several twigs and branches, would come to rest on the forest floor.

We'd always leave it lie, but someone else may have just begun to imagine its usefulness. Grapevines, as a craft item and decorative piece, have become quite popular in recent years.

Grapevines can be lots of fun in the right place. They can also be a lot of work for landowners interested in high quality timber.



# The Way of the *Grapevine*

**By: Adam Downing, *Virginia Cooperative Extension***

Wild grapevines (*Vitus spp.*) are common in many woodlots. The fruit produced, in late summer to early fall, feeds a variety of wildlife. Black bears, cardinal, fox sparrow, gray fox, mockingbird, ruffed grouse and wild turkey are among at least 53 different wildlife species that use the plant for food. Wild grapevines also provide cover and rest sites for many birds and small mammals. Grapes in your woodlot can enhance its value for wildlife but, grapevines left unchecked, may also degrade the woodlots attractiveness to wildlife.

Grapevines have a very limited ability to grow "upward" by themselves as trees do. Their reaching and climbing skills, however, are exceptional! While wild grape can survive and grow in partial shade, their life goal is to be at the top, in full sunlight. How does a plant that can't support itself vertically, grow tall and reach the top? Grapevines use trees and other plants to reach tall heights.

Foliage and vines of wild grape will completely cover tree crowns as they greedily grab as much sunlight as possible. If vine growth is left unmanaged, it's bad news for trees. Once a tree is over-topped with grapevines, unless someone or something intervenes, damage will occur. The most visible and common damage is mechanical. This is a result of two factors. First of all, a tree can't usually compete with grapevines for sunlight. Vine growth is usually very rapid. An over-topped tree is weakened by receiving less sunlight. The second factor is the sheer mass of vine entanglements. A weakened tree, with weight hanging from it's crown, will eventually break, often resulting in permanent damage or death.

The nature of grapevine growth in a woodlot is often destructive, yet this plant provides certain benefits. Fortunately, this is not an all or nothing situation. A landowner who values his or her property for attracting wildlife may want to allow wild grape to grow in a designated area. A 1/4 - 1/2 acre area is

large enough to grow a healthy plot of grapes to yield many benefits for wildlife, yet small enough to manage.

Wild grapevines are fairly easily controlled. Minimum requirements are a sharp pruning saw, medium sized squirt bottle and a dose of perseverance. Grapevines needing control should be cut in two places. The first cut should be made just above the ground and sprayed with an appropriate herbicide. Greater control of re-sprout is achieved when spraying the cut stump. Coat the surface of the stump with an approved herbicide as soon as possible after making the cut. Some recommended herbicides for use in forestry settings and grapevines control are [Common Name (Brand Name)]: Glyphosate (Accord), Picloram + 2,4-D (Tordon RTU, Pathway), and Triclopyr (Garlon 3A, Pathfinder). **Remember, when dealing with chemicals, it's of utmost importance to read and follow the label!**

Limited success may be achieved without the use of a chemical if the area is densely shaded. However, grapevine roots may graft, allowing a cut vine to receive nourishment from a healthy plant many feet away.

The second cut should occur about shoulder height on the vine left hanging in the tree. This cut serves two purposes. Grapevines have the ability to re-root as a cutting if the cut vine comes into contact with mineral soil. Secondly, a vine with a cut at eye level is much easier to spot than one in contact with the ground. It's easy to lose track of where you've been and what's been cut when doing this kind of physical labor.

Timing is important when undertaking a grapevine job. If you are considering a timber harvest or thinning, and grapevines are prevalent in your woodlot, they should be controlled before any of these activities. Timber harvesting and thinning makes more sunlight available to the remaining vegetation. Additional sunlight on a few grapevines will quickly produce many grapevines making control much more challenging.
Time of the year is also important. Mid-summer through early fall is the best time to control vines with or without herbicides. Winter and early spring are good times, while visibility is better, to identify and flag vines needing control. The worst time of year to control grapevines with the cut & spray method is early spring when the sap is flowing. A cut made this time of year will "bleed" so much that the herbicide will literally be flushed out and made unavailable for uptake by the plant.

Like other aspects in nature, balance is essential. As owners of forestland, you have the opportunity to be part of the balancing act!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