

To Leave or Not to Leave?

That is the question we ask every time we build a brush pile and every time we prepare to burn it. Brush piles make great habitat for mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates, and microorganisms! We burn to clean up the landscape a bit and with the goal of killing any seeds or berries from brush that we have cut. We don't have a formula for deciding what to burn and how many to leave. Most often it depends on the placement of the piles but sometimes we make that decision when we're building it. For example, we have kept all the brush piles at the edge of the prairie beside each of the trails into the woods. This edge pile serves as more than habitat. It also provides temporary cover for birds and other critters when predators are out and about.

When we burn, I can't help but think of the soil microbes and invertebrates. These piles get extremely hot, sterilizing the ground beneath them and killing anything living in the soil. What happens next is weeds will begin to grow. On our land, we prefer to encourage the native plants to grow. To overcome this, we blow the ashes away from the pile with a leaf blower and plant seed the following spring.

To burn the piles we use a 3:1 diesel to gas ratio. We also use a 2 gallon stainless steel spray tank to start the fire and move it around the pile. We learned this technique from friends of ours. It works wonderfully! Below is a picture of the spray tank.



Burning brush piles is a good activity for the cold, winter season. It minimizes the number of "critters" that are harmed and it minimizes

the risk of the fire spreading where you don't want it when you do a prescribed burn.