

## Boxelder (*Acer negundo*)

### DESCRIPTION:

Boxelder is a native tree closely related to other maple species. Though it naturally grows in riparian corridors and floodplain forests, it is an opportunistic species that quickly colonizes upland habitats in the absence of wildland fires. It is not a “natural” component of oak woodlands. Boxelder is a weak tree that is easily damaged by storms and has a relatively short life span, rarely living more than 40 years. Since this tree is so weak it has limited commercial value and can actually be a hazardous tree in a landscape setting. However, this fragile nature creates opportunities for wildlife woodpeckers, insects and cavity nesting birds. Boxelders can be found just about everywhere from their natural riverside habitat to old fields, urban waste areas and disturbed woodlands.

**-3**  
**Agressive**  
**Weed**

### IDENTIFICATION:

Boxelder is an awkward tree, often leaning and crooked. They are fast growing, but short-lived, and so rarely have trunks more than 16” in diameter. Leaves and branches are arranged opposite of each other on the stem. The bark is gray to light brown, with shallow interlacing ridges. Each leaf is composed of three leaflets that are irregularly toothed. The leaves resemble those of poison ivy in that the outer leaflets have a pointed mitten shape with “thumbs” and the terminal leaflet has a thumb on each side of the leaf. The twigs have a green to purplish green color and have a glaucous, wax-like film that rubs off when touched. This last feature will differentiate it from just about any other tree species, even in the winter. Seeds are similar to other maples with the common helicopter-like samaras.

### CONTROL METHODS:

**Organic:** Remove the root of saplings with a sharp shovel, Parsnip Predator or a weed wrench. Consider the effects of soil disturbance and erosion when uprooting plants, especially on slopes (compared to the impacts of using herbicide).

Box elders will vigorously resprout if they are simply cut down. To prevent this, tie a heavy-duty black plastic bag around the stump or cover with a weighted bucket and leave in place for 2 growing seasons. Otherwise, repeated cutting of resprouts immediately after they appear will be needed for 1-3 growing seasons.

Girdling, if done correctly, may also be effective. Regular controlled burns will prevent the establishment of boxelder seedlings.

**Chemical:** Treat cut stumps with glyphosate (Roundup®, etc.) or triclopyr (Garlon® 4 Tordon®, etc.) at the rate recommended on the label. Triclopyr can also be used for basal bark treatment for trees under 8” in diameter. Avoid treating in spring when sap is flowing up to the leaves.

Always read herbicide labels carefully before use and always apply according to the instruction on the product label.

### NATIVE ALTERNATIVES:

Red maple (*Acer rubra*) is a small maple which is considerably less aggressive, and more attractive and durable. Other small trees that can be used in place of boxelder include pagoda dogwood (*Cornus alternifolia*) for shade and hawthorns (*Crataegus* sp.) or serviceberry (*Amelanchier* spp.) for sunny places.

