

# Cutting Oriental Bittersweet Vines for Invasive Plant Prevention



# Step 1

## Oriental Bittersweet Vine Identification

The most common invasive tree-climbing vine in the Northeastern US is oriental (or Asiatic) bittersweet. It is mostly seen growing up the trunks of trees. When young, the vine has small white dots and sharp buds.



Photo Credit: James H. Miller,  
USDA Forest Service,  
Bugwood.org

As the vines grow, they often intertwine.



Photo Credit: James H. Miller,  
USDA Forest Service,  
[Bugwood.org](http://Bugwood.org)

When the vines grow larger, they take on a whitish hue with dark splotches. The vines will maintain this look for several years.



Photo Credit: James H. Miller,  
USDA Forest Service,  
[Bugwood.org](http://Bugwood.org)



When oriental bittersweet vines get especially large, the bark begins to peel off in layers, and the splotches become less noticeable.



Photo Credit: Chris Evans,  
University of Illinois,  
[Bugwood.org](http://Bugwood.org)



At their worst, oriental bittersweet vines can reach over 6" in diameter, and a single tree can have dozens of vines growing up it. This heavy weight can break tree limbs and even topple the entire tree.





The leaves of oriental bittersweet are slightly oval with edges that are wavy.



The native American bittersweet has longer leaves with sharper edges.



Photos Credit: Chris Evans,  
University of Illinois,  
Bugwood.org



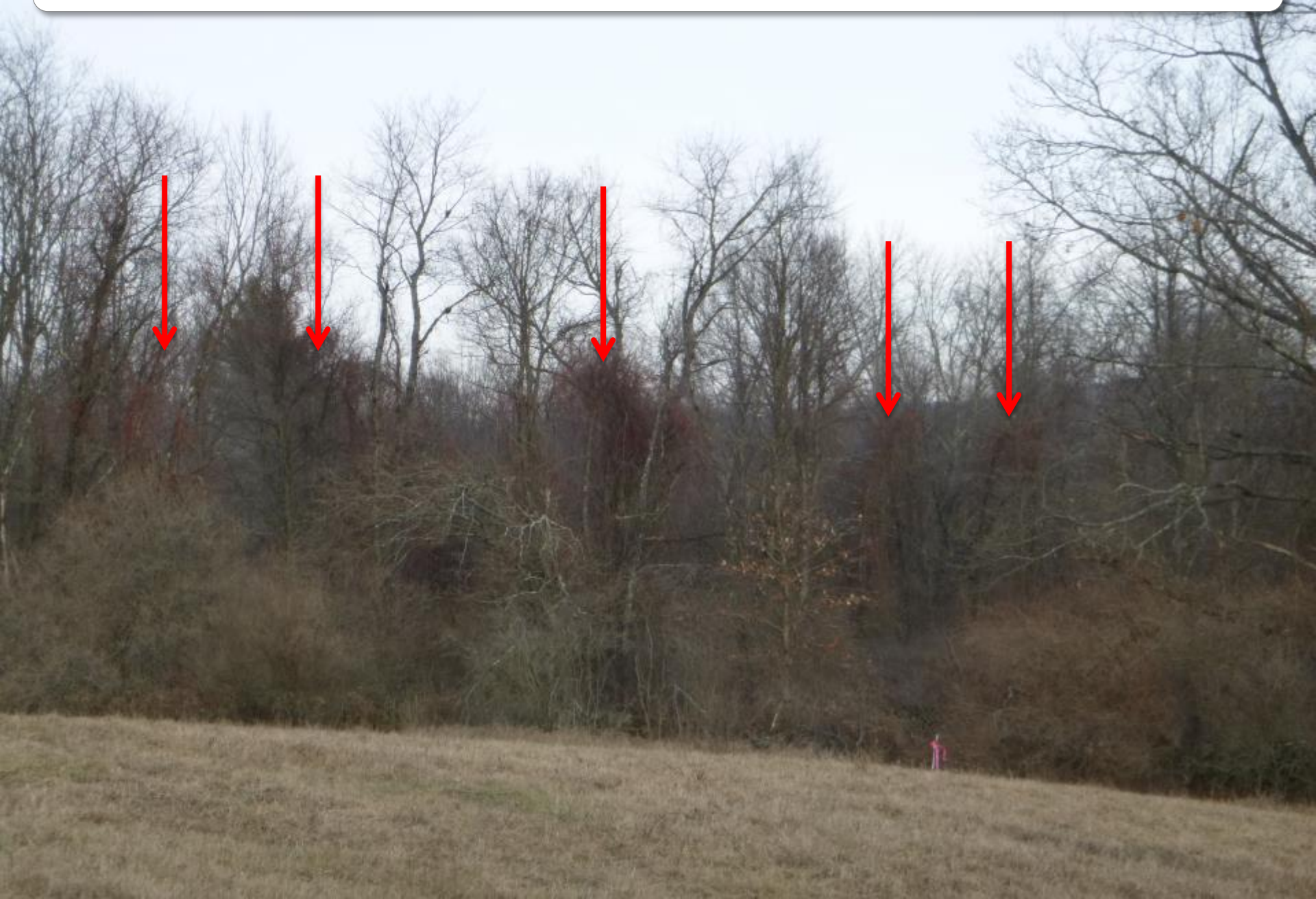
The fruit of oriental bittersweet are abundant red berries with yellow/orange capsules, and are found all over the vine.



The native American bittersweet fruit is also red, but the capsules are dark orange or red, and are found in distinct clumps.



The abundant fruit means the vine can be spotted from a distance.



## Step 2

# Cutting Oriental Bittersweet Vines



# CAUTION!

Vines should be cut only when trees have lost their leaves for the winter. In general, cut vines no earlier than mid-October and no later than mid-May. Otherwise, the leaves on the tree could be scorched by the sudden increase in sunlight.

Each vine should be cut twice whenever possible to reduce sprouts from reattaching to the remaining vine: once at ground level, and once at chest level or above. The order comes down to personal preference. In the picture below, you can see 4 foot chunks of vine resting on the ground.



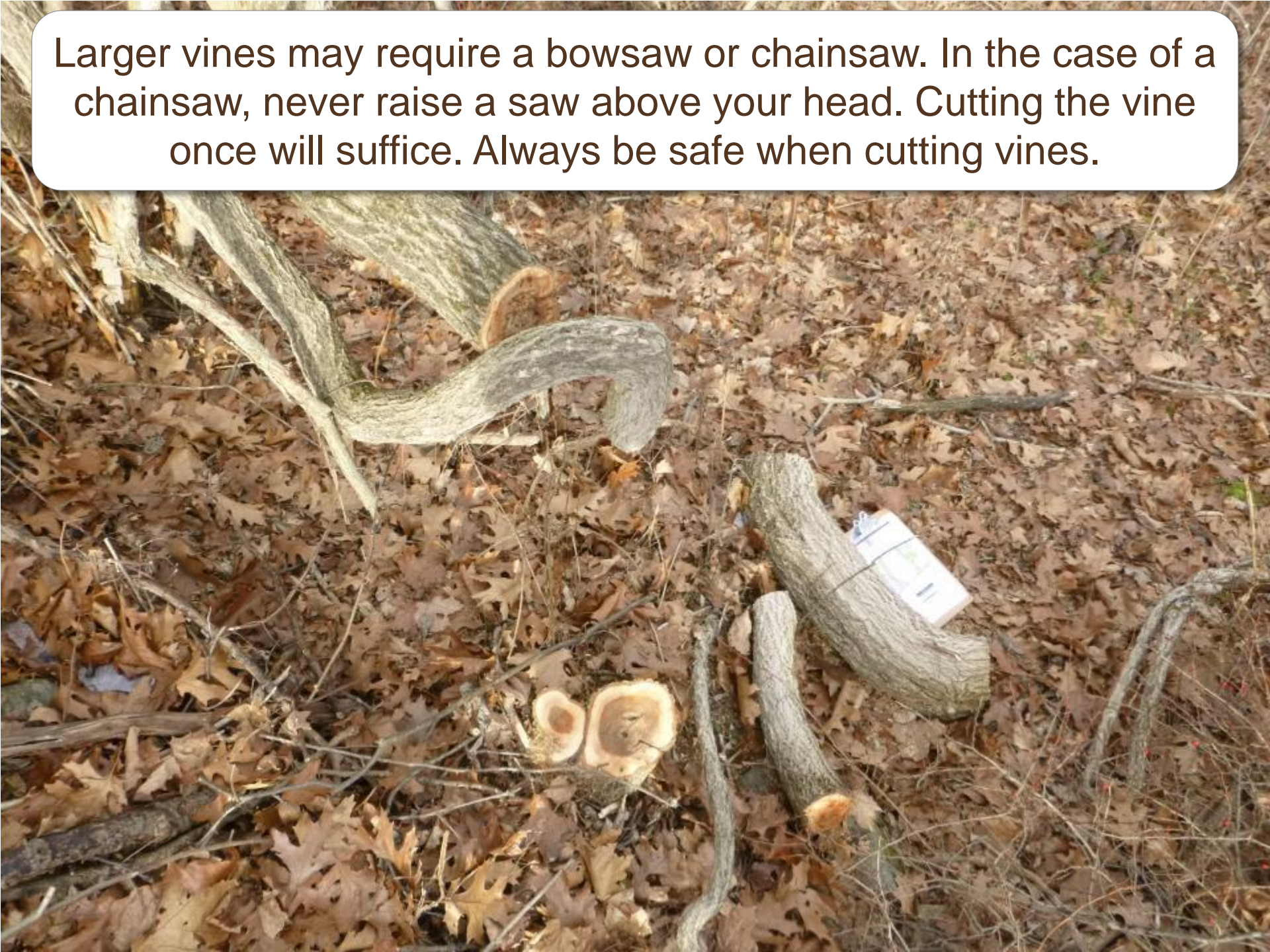


Most vines can be cut with simple hand pruners or loppers. The vines are likely to resprout, but these can also be cut. Each year a single oriental bittersweet vine can produce over 10,000 berries, so it is important to stop that production by cutting them.





Larger vines may require a bowsaw or chainsaw. In the case of a chainsaw, never raise a saw above your head. Cutting the vine once will suffice. Always be safe when cutting vines.



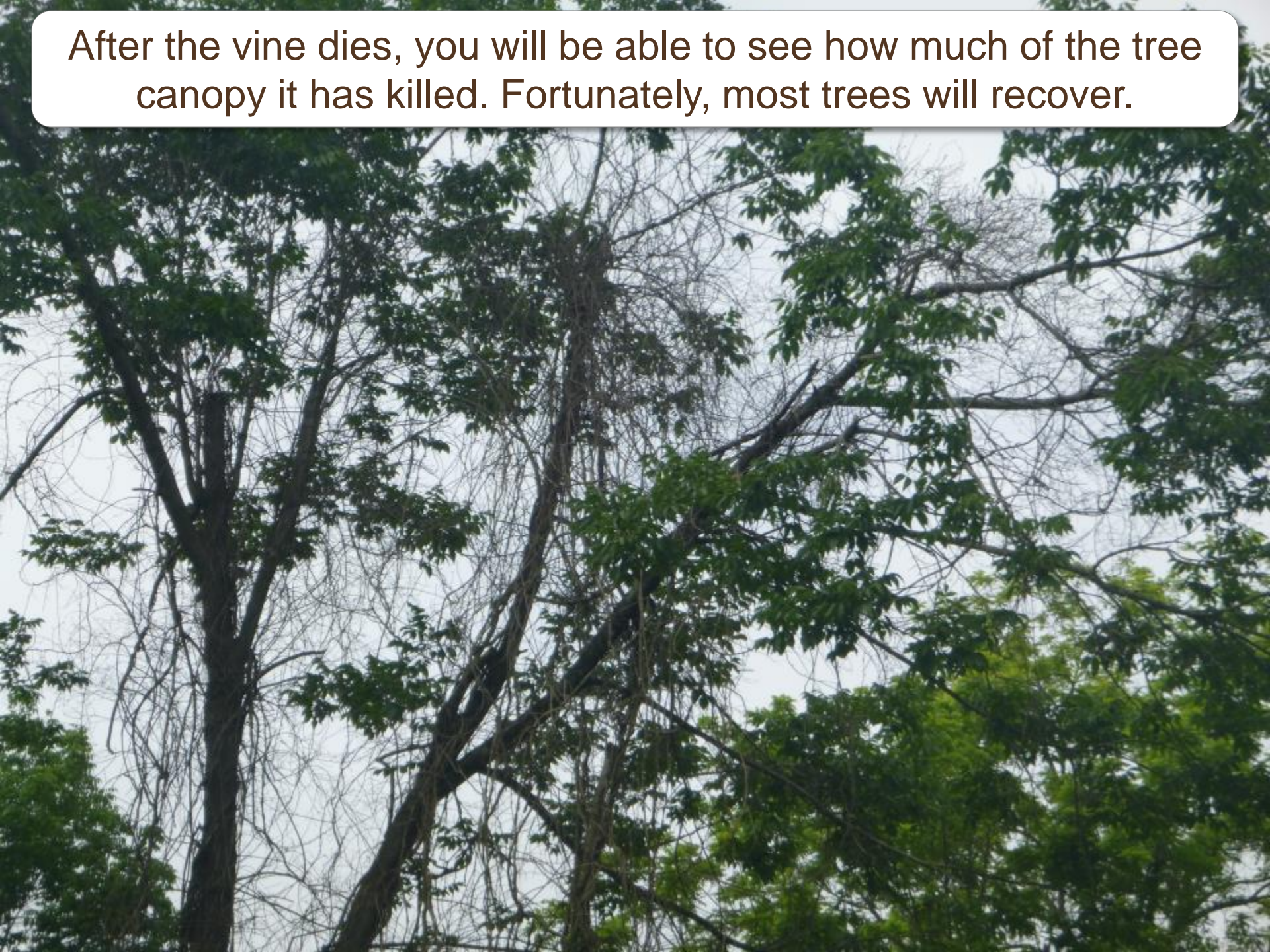


Also cut vines that are growing on small young trees. These saplings are your future forest, and should be saved.





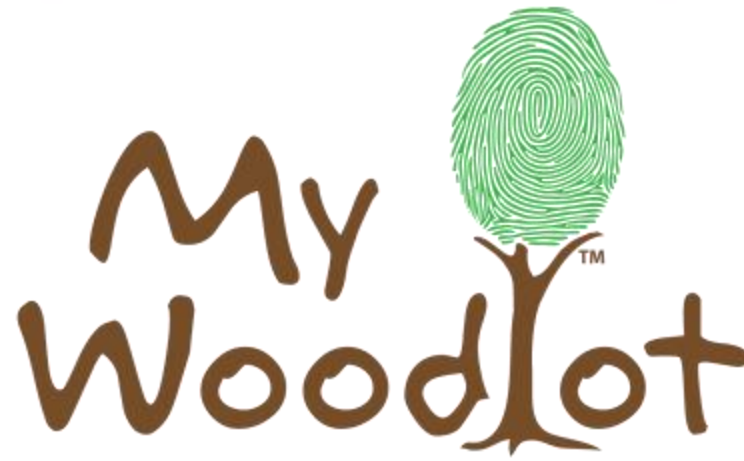
After the vine dies, you will be able to see how much of the tree canopy it has killed. Fortunately, most trees will recover.





**CAUTION!** Never cut vines on dead trees, no matter how bad the infestation. In some cases, it is the vines themselves that are holding the tree upright.





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