The Value of a DBH Tape  
by Scott Brundage, Consulting Forester

Most forest landowners do not thin their woods enough in order to reduce the competition thereby enabling the faster growth of their more valuable trees. For example, a veneer quality, large walnut log can be worth $10.00 a board foot or more. A common or typical honey locust, elm, boxelder, river birch, most hickories and ash bring 6 cents to 8 cents on average per board foot. How can a landowner justify having one of these species crowding out a potentially quality walnut or white oak tree, for example. The best walnut tree I sold brought almost $10,000.00 on the stump, and I have sold several white oak trees for over $1,000.00 on the stump. The best honey locust, elm, boxelder, or river birch I have sold brought less than $20.00 on the stump.

The easiest way to thin/release your best (most valuable trees) is to know how fast they are growing. The easiest/best way to determine growth is to use a Diameter Breast Height (D.B.H.) tape. The cheapest tape I have found is the Stanley 25 ft. tape which also has a diameter tape on the back side of the tape, for which I paid under $8.00. My Forestry Supplies Catalog has D.B.H. tapes from $87.95 to $38.25. Add tax and shipping and those get expensive quickly. I spray a D.B.H. line on my tree at 4 1/2 feet above average ground level and a Tree Number so I can measure exactly the same place each year.

Sometimes I release a good tree (usually a walnut or white oak) by eliminating another walnut or white oak growing nearby, and I then want to know which one is growing the fastest.

A cheap D.B.H. Tape is "money well spent."

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