

# Grapevines—Another Reason to Hate Them

by Scott Brundage, Consulting Forester, Tree Farmer

Look closely and you'll see this magnificent buck has a grapevine wrapped around his antlers. Can you imagine the horrible slow death he suffered while trying to free himself?

Two hunters found the entire skeleton of this deer in November, 2009, in Cooper County. They took the antlered skull and placed it on the leaning tree for the picture showing the grapevine still entangled in the antlers.

Grapevines are a huge problem on good soils where they grow best, to a lesser problem on poorer soils where they are not as common. Most professional foresters hate grapevines; wildlife biologists often like them. Why? Grapevines like more fertile soils and need sunlight for best growth; thus, they often grow upward to the top of a tree and spread out over the crown for more sunlight. The weight of the vines in high winds, ice or snow storms can break out the tops of the best trees growing on the high value sites. On younger trees, the grapevines often bend the trees over ruining the future timber value and shading out wildlife food such as acorns and soft mast, i.e., cherries, persimmons, etc. Dense areas of grapevines even kill the trees.

Many wildlife biologists like grapevines for their wildlife food value. This fact is true in some cases and is a plus for grapevines. However, foresters consider grapevines to be a huge minus in overall forest and wildlife management considering the dollar loss of forest products and the loss of wildlife food produced by suppressed trees or worse losses by dead and/or dying trees. For example, a grapevine may produce five pounds of grapes, but shade out 20 pounds of acorns, cherries, persimmons, wild plums, etc., and ruin hundreds or thousands of dollars of timber value (black walnut trees).

In our intensively managed Tree Farms, we kill grapevines. We manage our timber for quality forest products and deer and turkey. To kill grapevines, we cut them off near the ground where they go up into the tree. We also cut them where there are loops of vines coming out of the ground before going up to the tree. If there are three loops, we make six cuts plus one more where it goes up the tree. We do this to stop resprouting and to give more cut surface area to apply herbicide to kill the vine. Without herbicide application, grapevines will sprout back in most cases, and in a very few years the same problems appear. We apply (usually with a spray bottle) undiluted Pathway. We buy Pathway, which has an identical label to Tordon RTU. (Active Ingredients Picloram 5.4% and 2,4-D 20.9%). Pathway is much cheaper in 2.5 gallons containers than Tordon quart sizes. This treatment kills grapevines year around except March to about mid-May when sap is flowing. Applying herbicide then is like treating the end of a flowing garden hose, and the kill is greatly reduced.

Grapevines, in most cases, do much more harm than good and should be killed whenever possible.