

# Missouri Chapter News

Walnut Council: Growing Walnut and Other Fine Hardwoods



## Considerations in Selecting a Power Pole Saw for Pruning

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Pruning is one of the most important requirements for growing high quality hardwood trees, so selecting the right pruning equipment deserves some thought.

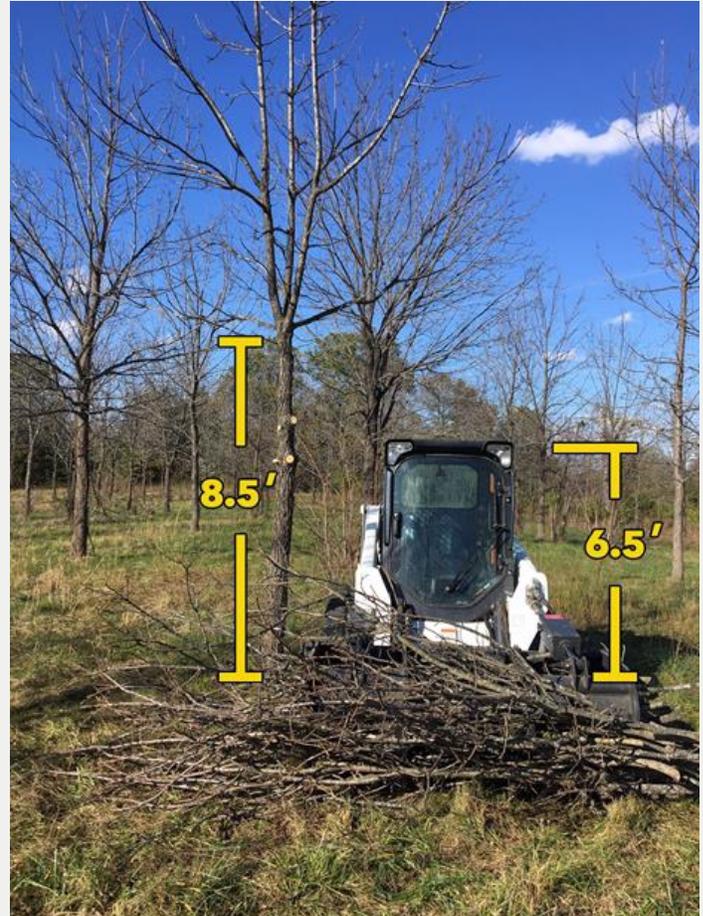
Every tree farm and tree farmer is different and one type of equipment does not fit every need, but the thinking process before buying a saw might go something like this:

- First, consider how many trees you plan to prune, and at what rate you plan to do the pruning. A part of this consideration is your own strength and stamina.
- The next consideration might be: how accessible are the trees, what species are they, how high on each tree do you plan to prune, and what will you do with cut limbs?
- The third consideration groups all other factors: the purchase price and maintenance cost of the saw, and your own preferences in brand name, dealer, and power source: electric or gas.

I recently decided to buy a power pruning saw; here is how my thinking process went:

Since I do not plan to prune more than about 100-200 trees per year, and I typically don't prune more than 30-40 trees per day, a high production rate is not a primary consideration for me. This means light use, and long storage periods. New gas powered saws do better than older ones in long storage periods, I am told, but I am still concerned with fuel storage issues.

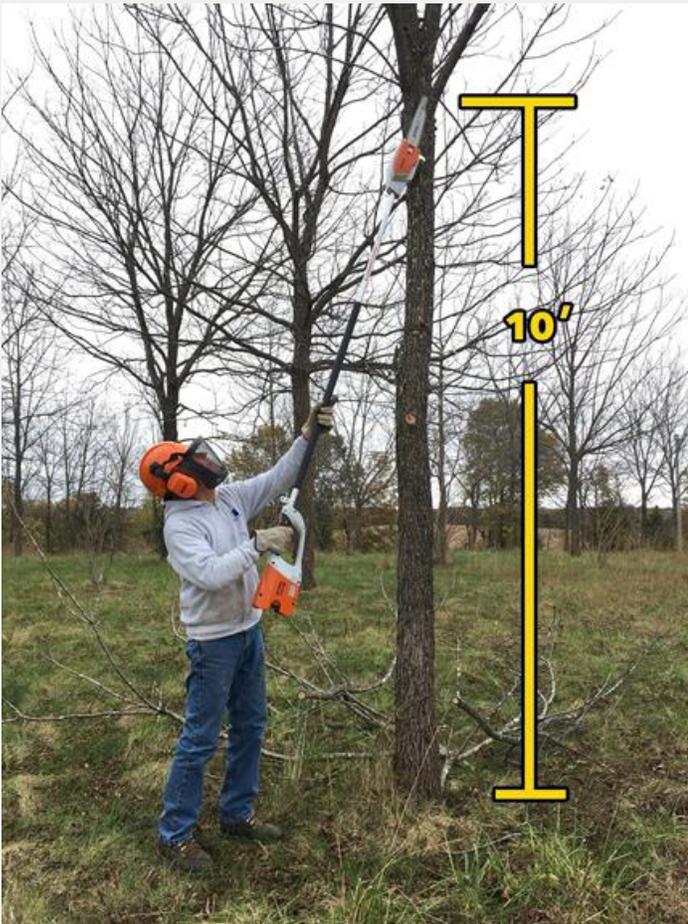
Equally important, I am not growing tall trees. My belief is that with the tree genetics I have and the soil I have, I am better off to have fewer trees with wider canopies and shorter stems. A minimum 8.5 foot butt log to be sawed into boards, and at least 6.5 foot equipment clearance under the lowest limbs, are my minimum requirements.



**Target pruning heights are determined by the desired length of the butt log and equipment height used to maintain your plantation.**

Of course I like butt logs longer than 8.5 feet, but even when pruning a tree with a 10-foot butt log, I generally don't need an extension saw.

**Note:** Shorter pruning saws have a disadvantage in that you tend to stand closer to the limb being sawn and you tend to reach up higher. This increases the risk of the cut branch falling on your head, or falling on the saw and sliding down the pole onto your left hand (I speak from experience). The Stihl manual recommends nothing higher than a 60-degree angle.



**My new Stihl HTA 65 pruning saw lets me easily reach a 10' pruning height without the physical stress of manual pruning.**

I keep my tree plantings mowed or goat-grazed to control invasive species encroachment so foot and vehicle access to all sides of the trees is easy which makes pruning easier.

I am of an age that I will not be doing extended pruning sessions. My typical routine is to walk down a row of trees for about an hour, pruning as I go. Then I put the saw down and stack the limbs I've cut into piles. Then I take the skid loader and move the limb piles out of the tree plantation.

This means short (an hour or less) periods of saw use followed by an hour or more of non-saw use. This will accommodate battery recharge and obviate the need for multiple batteries. Of course gas powered saws will also work fine in my work scenario.

I will be pruning walnut trees and sawing small diameter limbs (although there are often exceptions to this generalization). This means relatively low power is OK and narrow saw kerf is OK – but higher power and wider kerf is also good and might in fact be better.

Other considerations in making my purchase:

- I did not investigate manual pruning equipment, since I do not feel I have the energy to do manual pruning.
- I did not investigate brands other than Stihl because I have confidence in Stihl and because a Stihl dealer I like is only four miles from my house.
- I chose a battery powered pruning saw, in part, because I have a Stihl battery powered chainsaw and plan to use the same charger and one battery for both.
- Cost was not my primary consideration. I keep my equipment a long time and want it to be substantial and long-lasting.

With the above thoughts in mind, I purchased a **Stihl HTA 65** battery-powered fixed-length pruning saw. With battery in place, bar and chain installed, and oil reservoir full, the saw weighs 12 pounds. It is 7'11" long (with the 12" bar). I can comfortably cut limbs 10 feet above the ground which suits my needs. It cost \$755 which included tax, a 12" bar, 71PM3 chain, AP-300 battery, and AL-300 battery charger. I ordered it on the Stihl website and picked it up at my local Stihl dealer a week later.

So far I'm pleased with the **Stihl HTA 65**. As with any piece of equipment, it will take several seasons of use to truly determine all its strengths and possible weaknesses.

Stay tuned for a related article from fellow members (coming soon) about their experiences in using gas powered pole saws.

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