

FORESTRY 101

Painting Trees

by Chris Osborne

Whether marking a path to a deer stand, painting property boundaries, or even working with a professional forester to mark a timber stand improvement, the need occasionally arises for woodland owners to paint trees. To do the job properly, there are a few tips and recommendations that will help improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the marking.

To begin, we look at the types of paint available, their differences as well as application methods. There are paints available specifically for tree application. These paints are formulated to be used either for short-term applications, such as marking trees to be cut, or long-term applications, such as painting boundaries. Both “tree marking” and “boundary marking” paints are readily available from forestry supply companies.

Tree Marking

Tree-marking paint is typically used in situations where there isn't a need for the paint to remain visible for an extended period of time. Tree-marking paint will typically remain visible on trees for up to three years. This paint comes in a variety of sizes, such as aerosol, quart, and gallon cans.

Tree-marking paint is typically sprayed onto trees not brushed. There are a variety of gun type sprayers available for tree marking. Some spray guns are designed to screw directly onto the quart cans. There are backpack sprayers as well as pressurized applicators. It is important to remember when spraying paint to wear old clothes and use caution on windy days. The type of spray applicator you use determines the distance you must be from the tree. A Panama Paint Gun (see following page) allows the greatest distance with its pressurized system. The quart mounted gun sprayers are typically used up to ten feet from the tree. Of course aerosols are similar to normal spray paint, so they require a much closer application distance. When using tree-marking paint, applications are typically applied in spots at eye level. These “spots” of paint should be circular and at least a few inches in diameter.

When marking trees for a timber stand improvement or harvest ensure the same color of paint is used uniformly and put in writing if using a contractor. For example, trees to be cut are marked in one color while trees to be retained are painted using another color. To avoid timber theft during a harvest, always place a spot of paint at eye level as well as

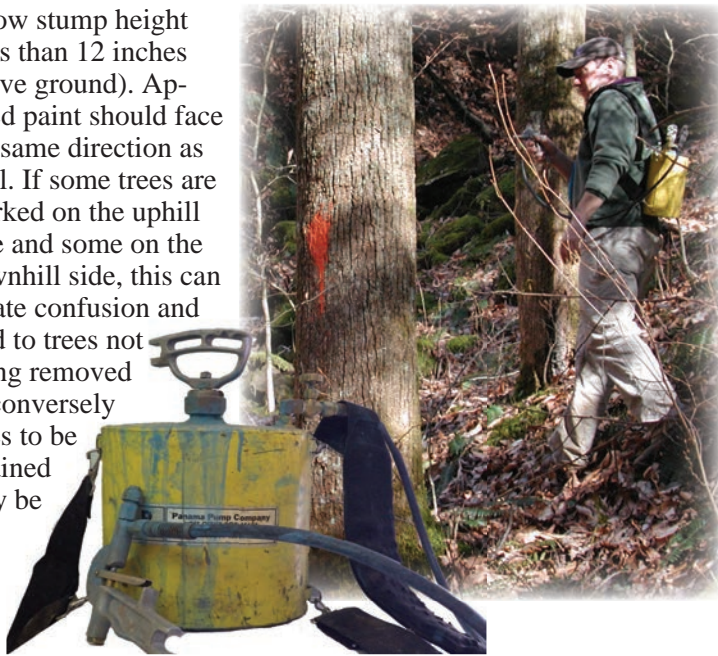


Photos courtesy: Chris Osborne

Trees can be painted for a variety of reasons and in different ways depending on your objective. This tree has been painted with blue dots at chest and stump height indicating the tree will be removed. Matching the right paint and applicator is critical to an effective tree painting project. A spray gun that screws right on to the paint can was used for this application.



below stump height (less than 12 inches above ground). Applied paint should face the same direction as well. If some trees are marked on the uphill side and some on the downhill side, this can create confusion and lead to trees not being removed or conversely trees to be retained may be cut.



A Panama Paint Gun, with its pressurized system, allows users to paint trees from approximately 20 feet away. This can be very helpful in rugged terrain.

It is important to remember to clean the application equipment when finished. It is best to clean any screens or filters on the marking guns as well as run mineral spirits or paint thinner through them. This cleaning can be accomplished by filling an empty spray container with the thinner or mineral spirits then pumping it through the gun until the spray changes from paint to thinner or spirits.

Boundary Marking

Boundary paint is applied when there is a need for long-lasting marking. This type of paint can be seen on trees for as much as ten years or more. Boundary-marking paint is considerably thicker than tree marking paint and as a result is applied using a brush. While boundary-marking paint can be mixed with a thinner and sprayed, this reduces the residual effect of the paint considerably.

It takes longer to paint trees using boundary-marking paint, as you must be within arm's length of each tree you intend to paint. Boundary marking is inherently messier than tree marking, as carrying a gallon can around in the woods is no easy task. As implied by the name, boundary-marking paint

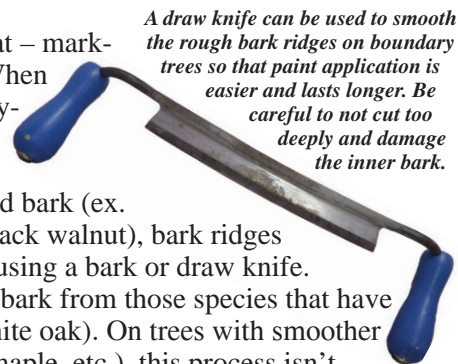


Specialized tree marking paint is used for marking boundaries. When applied correctly boundary paint can last ten years.

is used for just that – marking boundaries. When applying boundary-marking paint to trees with rough

or deeply furrowed bark (ex. chestnut oak or black walnut), bark ridges can be smoothed using a bark or draw knife. Also knock loose bark from those species that have flaky bark (ex. white oak). On trees with smoother bark (beech, red maple, etc.), this process isn't necessary. Paint should be applied in bands across the face of the tree. Also, the boundary-marking paint should be applied from a direction so that those approaching the boundary are alerted to the change. If the objective is for people to know when they are leaving your property, the paint should face toward your property. If the purpose is to alert adjoining landowners they are entering your property, then the paint should face the adjoining landowner's property. If both are objectives then it becomes necessary to paint both sides of the tree. Paint should be applied at eye level, so it is prominent to those approaching the boundary.

As with tree-marking paint, be sure to remember the clean-up when finished. Brushes should be cleaned with mineral spirits or paint thinner and draw knives oiled to prevent rusting.



A draw knife can be used to smooth the rough bark ridges on boundary trees so that paint application is easier and lasts longer. Be careful to not cut too deeply and damage the inner bark.

Tree-Marking Equipment:

- Tree- or boundary-marking paint: Available from Forestry-Suppliers and Ben Meadows
- Hand-held tree-marking guns: Available from Forestry-Suppliers and Ben Meadows
- Marking guns with tanks: Available from Forestry-Suppliers and Ben Meadows
- Backpack marking guns: Available from Forestry-Suppliers
- Bark or draw knife: Available from Baileys, Forestry-Suppliers and Ben Meadows
- Paint brush: Available at local hardware stores as well as Forestry-Suppliers and Ben Meadows

www.baileysonline.com
www.forestry-suppliers.com
www.benmeadows.com

About the Author:

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