
Axes



The ax is a constant companion of the crosscut sawyer. It is not possible to be a proficient sawyer without mastering certain ax skills.

The Missoula Technology and Development Center has published detailed information about axes that will not be repeated here. See Bernie Weisgerber's report, *An Ax to Grind: A Practical Ax Manual* (1999), and the accompanying two-part video, *An Ax to Grind* (1999). Another video, *Hand Tools for Trail Work, Parts 1 and 2* (1998) show ax and saw experts Ian Barlow and Dolly B. Chapman using crosscut saws and axes in the field.

Our brief coverage of axes will be limited to applications related to crosscut saws. These include using an ax while underbucking, driving wedges, and holding log segments in place while logs are being bucked. The ax is also recommended for cutting the undercut when trees are felled.

Safety Considerations

- Always remove branches, underbrush, overhead obstructions, or debris that might interfere with limbing and chopping.
- Do not allow anyone to stand in the immediate area.
- Make sure workers know how far materials may fly.
- Require that all workers wear the appropriate personal protective equipment.
- Always position your body securely while working with an ax.
- Never chop crosshanded; always use a natural striking action.
- Be alert when working on hillsides or uneven ground.
- If you cut a sapling that is held down by a fallen log (a spring pole), the sapling may spring back.
- If you have no need to cut something, leave it alone.
- Never use chopping tools as wedges or mauls.
- Do not allow two persons to chop or drive wedges together on the same tree.
- When chopping limbs from a felled tree, stand on the opposite side of the log from the limb being chopped and swing toward the top of the tree or branch.
- Do not allow the ax handle to drop below a plane parallel with the ground unless you are chopping on the side of a tree opposite your body.

Single-bit Axes

Single-bit axes used for driving soft metal or plastic wedges need to be relatively heavy, usually 4 or 5 pounds. Driving aluminum or magnesium wedges will not harm an ax, but driving steel wedges with the poll (back of the head) of a single-bit ax may ruin it. Instead, carry a small single-jack hammer for driving steel wedges. Some sawyers carry only a single-bit ax with a straight handle and attempt to do everything with just one ax.