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CIS 443 User Interfaces
A Skill that I Have

Remove invasive plants in Oregon

Summers, from 1981 through 1986, I worked on the Buildings and Grounds crew at the Washington Park Zoo in Portland, Oregon. (The zoo has since been renamed to The Oregon Zoo.) I learned a lot about how to do physical labor, how to work in a "blue collar" environment, and how to do commercial gardening and maintenance.

One of the hundreds of jobs that I did on the crew was to assist the gardeners in fighting back two invasive plant species that thrived in some of the remote parts of the zoo property.

The two invasive plants were English Ivy and blackberries. (You can see these plants all over Oregon, including all over Eugene.)

In the remainder of this document, I will explain how to remove blackberries. One important feature of blackberry plants, which affects how you remove them, is that the plants have sharp pointed thorns across all of their stems. Another important feature is that they are strong and resilient and, if you don't get rid of them, will just grow and grow and grow. Removing blackberries takes special skill and determination.

For blackberries, the two key garden tools are a "clearing axe" and a "4-tine cultivator". We had a simpler name for the cultivator, probably a "fork hoe". Figure 1 shows these tools. You also need leather gloves and a sturdy long-sleeved jacket, such as a thick denim jacket. It might be good to have some kind of face protection, even if just safety glasses, though I don't think we used them at the time.



Figure 1. A clearing axe and a 4-tine cultivator (or "fork hoe"), perfect for removing blackberries.

There are basically five steps in removing the blackberries:

1. Use the axe to whack away at the stems until you have clumps of bushes that can be pulled away.
2. Use the fork hoe to pull the clumps away and into a pile. Note that the long handle keeps you away from the thorns.

3. Once the ground is cleared, use the fork hoe to break up the ground, and pull up the roots. The roots are as strong as rope, so you might also need the axe to chop them. The roots seem to travel horizontally and be somewhat shallow in the soil. They did not seem to go deep into the ground.
4. Dispose of the blackberries. The challenge here is to be sure that you are not just putting them somewhere else where they will re-root and thrive again.
5. Return to the site periodically, such as once a year, to see where the bushes have re-appeared from the ground, so you can find the roots that you missed, and attack them again.

Removing blackberry bushes is hard work, but it is a satisfying experience to see them gone. Even though you know that you can only fight back the species back in limited settings, such as on the grounds of the zoo, or on your property, it is still satisfying to know that you are able to control the earth within that limited boundary.

Acknowledgements

The two photos are from:

<https://www.tse-ak.com/product-page/sandvik-brush-axe>

<https://www.homedepot.com/p/Ames-4-Tine-Forged-Cultivator-2853600/204507083>