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Cutting Posts and Poles for Profit

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Many landowners fail to recognize the value in their timber-lands. A stand of timber large enough to be cut for sawlogs is readily recognized as a valuable asset. Too often post and pole sized stands are overlooked. In many cases these post and pole stands, when properly harvested, will give the most benefits in the long run.

In addition to cash returns, there are other benefits for the progressive timber owner. Thinning a stand of post and pole sized timber will:
1. Increase grass growth by opening up the stand.
2. Increase timber growth.
3. Increase moisture by allowing rain and snow to reach the forest floor.
4. Make it easier to locate livestock in the woods.
5. Reduce the danger of crown fires.
6. Improve wildlife habitat.

By E. K. Ferrell, Extension Forester and James A. Brown, Farm Forester, Department of Game, Fish, and Parks
After you look over your timber and decide to harvest it contact your local farm forester, county agent, or post and pole yard operator before you start cutting. They can give you important information on markets, harvesting shortcuts, proper management practices, and other money saving ideas. They can also give you information on the best time of the year to cut in order to reduce damage by insects, disease, and wood staining fungi. Contacting the local post yard operator before cutting is a must. He can give you prices, type and size of product needed, volume needed, and the necessary order for the product he wants.

Before you start cutting, look around your farm or ranch. You will likely find plenty of equipment that can be used to make the job easier, faster, and more profitable. A chain saw and truck are the most important tools. Your manure loader or hay sled will come in handy in a pole cutting operation. Poles (10 feet or longer) bring in more return and have a readier market than shorter lengths.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post length (feet)</th>
<th>Top diameter inside bark (minimum in inches)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Big 8</td>
<td>7.5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The dimension chart gives all of the standard ranges for measurement of posts and poles. While the length is self explanatory, the top diameter is sometimes misunderstood. Top diameter refers to the diameter of the post at the small end. This is measured inside the bark; in other words imagine the bark removed from the top and measure the diameter of the wooden portion only.

**Figure 3. A straight well-limbed post.**
Finally, check the post for foreign particles such as nails, staples or barbed wire.

After the posts are cut, stacked, and ready for market, take care to prevent loss of value from fungus and insect damage. This is especially important between the spring thaw and fall freeze-up. During the warm summer months fungus spores (seeds) are active and likely to attack the wood. This results in coloring any wood left longer than a couple of weeks in the timber. The resultant color may give either a blue, black or green hue to the wood. In post yards this is referred to as “blue stain.”

While blue stain doesn’t affect the strength quality of a post, it does cause a difference in treatability. This difference makes it extremely difficult to treat a charge of posts with a few blue stained posts mixed in.

**SUMMARY**

1. Check with the farm forester for technical assistance.
2. Secure a market for your product before cutting.
3. Cut a straight post to the proper length with square-cut ends.
4. Limb smoothly; prevent blue stain and insect damage.

By following the above suggestions, you can find a ready market for your product and additional income from your land. In the future it will be possible to take a load of posts into the local post yard whenever it is necessary for you to make a trip in that direction. This will bring extra income to you and increase your land value by thinning.

For additional information about timber harvesting and management contact: