

# Making Things Easier

By Gloria Hildebrandt

**T**he first weekend in July can be hot. I remember my mother's wisdom about keeping the house cool naturally: open the windows from about 8 pm and keep them open through the night to get the cool air in, and early in the morning, when you get up, close the windows. Even if it's 22°C inside, if the outside temperatures soar to above 30°, it'll feel cool inside in comparison.

I also know to go for a walk early or late in the day, when it's cooler. This morning I had my walk around the back. I got dressed in long pants, socks, boots, T-shirt, bug shirt with hood, and work gloves. I slapped on a mosquito protection patch and then the bug shirt. They work for me fairly well. Although swarms of mosquitoes whined around me, I was only bitten on my wrist where there was a gap between my bug shirt sleeve and my work glove, and on the back of my neck where the bug shirt was close enough to my bare skin for a mosquito to bite through the netting.

I also completed a little chore. I carried a rake with me and used it to spread out some piles of wood chips that Mike and I had created in the woods yesterday, dealing with downed branches. I simply walked and stopped to rake as I came to each pile. It would have been an irritating job if I had to go out back just to rake the piles. But as I was passing anyway, it was easier to stop a moment and rake each pile.

We've found a few ways to make it easier to do the wood chipping. It's great if the branches to be chipped are already stacked in a pile. I can then hand them to Mike who feeds them into the chipper. If we position the tractor

wagon to catch the chips, I can then drive it to the section of trail where I want to spread the chips, dump the wagon and rake them smooth.

## Letting The Chips Fall

Yesterday we chipped deep in the forest where the ice storm damage had been severe and where I had not been able to pile up all the branches. We figured out to gather wood beside the path and let the chips fall directly onto the trail. Since the whole trail here could benefit from chips, it doesn't matter where we put them. When we cleared a section, we moved the chipper and gathered the branches at the new spot. Hence the many small piles of chips.

But it's just not a pleasant time of year to work hard outside. Because of the bugs, the heat, humidity, the lack of wind, it was jungle-like out there yesterday. We sweated 'til we were soaked. The bug

veil makes it difficult to get air even when breathing deeply, so I was panting. Bending over repeatedly to drag branches out of the undergrowth made me dizzy and gave me a bit of a headache after a couple of hours.

When we got back inside and took off our protective gear, my hair was soaking wet from roots to ends. My face was red. I craved water and salt. In the relatively cool house, I felt cold to the bone. Mike had sweated through his clothes, but all he said was "That was pretty intense. Again."

## Easier Time of Year

There must be a time of year when doing this work is easier. Like autumn? When there are no mosquitoes, there's a cool breeze and no humidity? When you actually want to be outside working for hours?

But there's still so much to do. So many branches still down. Not nicely down, flat on the ground where creatures can

live under them as they slowly rot, but on the ground at angles, branches sticking up high off the ground, like the game of Pick-Up-Sticks on steroids. Unsightly, impenetrable branches that signal "this property is not well maintained."

However, we are making progress. The wood pile is also steadily growing as I stack the bigger branches, too big to chip, that Mike cuts up into stove lengths. Occasionally I drive the tractor wagon around to collect the cut wood and bring it back. Using the tractor wagon is another way to make work easier than trundling a wheelbarrow. The bigger challenge seems to be having patience, being satisfied with doing a little bit at a time, and working with, not despite, the seasons.

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▲ The trusty little old tractor and wagon can shift a mountain of wood chips, but it takes time. PHOTO BY GLORIA HILDEBRANDT.