

RODNEY WILL, OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

Eastern red cedars are not a welcome sight for most Oklahoma farmers and ranchers. Their encroachment causes the displacement of native plant and wildlife species and reduced livestock forage production, estimated at a \$205 million loss for cattle foraging alone. Because of their size and flammability, they pose the threat of accelerating a prairie grass fire into a catastrophic wildfire.

Yet for most farmers and ranchers, it's cost prohibitive to have these invasive trees removed from large acreages. Enter Dr. Rodney Will. His plan is to turn the invasive red cedar into a commercial product that will hopefully pay for the cost of its own removal.

Dr. Will, associate professor for the Department of Natural Resource Ecology and Management at Oklahoma State University, has received OCAST funding to show how turning the invasive trees into gardening mulch is a financially viable option.



But first he had to convince landowners, homeowners and gardeners of the idea.

His team's research has included comparing seven common wood-based mulches to red cedar mulch. The team examined the rate of decomposition of each mulch type, observing the soil's moisture, temperature, nutrients and pH and monitored for termites, insects and plant growth for various annuals, perennials and trees. He's also tested for aesthetics, finding red cedar mulch ranked highest for its attractive color and appearance.

[Read more about Dr. Will](#)