

Macadamia Farm Vegetation Management

A practical guide for Northern Rivers growers

Why It Matters

Under-tree vegetation isn't just aesthetic — it affects nut quality, disease pressure, fire risk, and harvest efficiency. Getting it right means fewer losses at processing and fewer fire-risk headaches come summer. This guide covers what works for macadamia orchards in the Northern Rivers NSW climate.

Under-Tree Mowing Timing

Objective: maintain groundcover at 5–10 cm through the growing season; reduce before harvest.

Timing	Goal	Notes
August–September	Pre-flowering mow	Reduces nutrient competition as trees wake up
November–December	Post-nut set	Keep groundcover low to reduce humidity around developing nuts
February–April	Pre-harvest cleanup	Clear groundcover 2–3 weeks before harvest for easier pickup
May–July	Minimal mowing	Let groundcover grow — soil protection, organic matter

***Northern Rivers tip:** wet-season growth is aggressive. You'll mow more often from December through March than growers further west.*

Groundcover Species

The right groundcover reduces erosion, adds organic matter, and doesn't compete heavily with trees.

Recommended

- **Kikuyu** — hardy, spreads quickly, handles traffic. Goats eat it (if you run them).
- **Caribbean stylo** — legume, fixes nitrogen, drought-tolerant once established.
- **Blue pearl** — low-growing, dense, good for wet areas.

Avoid

- **Giant sensitive plant** (*Mimosa pigra*) — spreads aggressively, nightmare to control.
- **Arundo donax** (giant reed) — near orchards, very hard to eradicate.

Mowing height: 5–8 cm. Any shorter and you risk soil exposure; any taller and you're not achieving the goal.

Fire Break Requirements

NSW Rural Fire Service requires fire breaks around properties. For macadamia farms, this usually means:

- **Perimeter breaks:** 3–5 m wide, cleared of vegetation.
- **Internal access tracks:** 3 m wide minimum, accessible by fire trucks.
- **Tree setback from breaks:** 10 m minimum from perimeter fire break to trees.

Check with Byron Shire, Ballina, or Lismore Council before establishing new breaks — specific requirements vary. Manage fire breaks with mowing, not spraying: maintained grass breaks are compliant and cheaper than chemical control long-term.

Equipment Considerations

What to look for in a mower for orchard work

- **Compact width** — fits between tree rows without trunk damage.
- **Low centre of gravity** — orchards have slope; stability matters.
- **Flail vs slasher** — flails handle scrubby growth better but need more horsepower.
- **Remote or autonomous options** — reduce operator exposure to chemicals and heat.

Key spec for Northern Rivers orchards

Requirement	Why
Handles wet conditions	Wet season = muddy ground; many mowers struggle
Rated for slopes over 15°	Most Northern Rivers orchards have rolling terrain
Deck width under 1.2 m	Fits standard row spacing (3–4 m centres)

Current options include conventional tractor-mounted slashers, dedicated flail mowers, and autonomous units designed for orchard under-tree work. Each has trade-offs on cost, maintenance, and labour input.

Quick Checklist

- Mow perimeter fire break before fire season (by end of September).
- Clear internal tracks of overgrowth monthly in growing season.
- Check council fire-break requirements for your shire.
- Mow under-tree 2–3 weeks before harvest.
- Keep mower deck height at 5–8 cm.
- Inspect groundcover species — remove any spreading problem weeds.

What's the right setup for your orchard?

Every orchard is different — slope, row spacing, soil type, and labour availability all affect what's practical. This guide is a starting point. For a property-specific assessment, get in touch with a local operator who understands Northern Rivers conditions.

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