

Leave it to Beavers

A.K.A. - "The Professionals"

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I had just returned from 2 years at an assignment away from home. The backyard had gotten a little overgrown while I was away, so I decided it was time to purchase some tree cutting tools and take care of the problem. After completing an initial evaluation of the size and type of trees and bushes that needed some attention, I spent the next several hours walking around the monstrous home and garden stores comparing prices. With the help of a knowledgeable garden department head, I decided on a 14-inch electric chainsaw. A chainsaw was just what I was missing in my life!

Since the trees I had targeted were smaller in stature, the chainsaw I had purchased was made for cutting branches with a diameter of 4-inches or smaller; but, it had plenty of power! I spent the afternoon cutting down several small trees and a couple of shrubs my wife loved, but I felt just had to go. (Boy, did I hear about that for the next several weeks!)

After I cut the trees down, I would cut up the limbs and trunks into smaller pieces. This was turning out to be a lot of fun. Then I turned my attention to a rather large plum tree that my wife and I both hated. She had told

“Who needs a professional?”

me over and over again to hire a professional tree-trimmer to cut it down, but I was on a winning streak and thought I'd take a look at it.

The tree appeared from ground level to be approximately 25 feet in height, so I retrieved my new 20-foot extension ladder that I'd been dying to use. I stood the ladder up and started cutting off smaller branches at the lower level. Then I said to myself, “Who needs a professional?” and “What does my wife know about trees anyhow?”

Soon I had enough of the branches off to extend the ladder to full height. That's when I realized the tree was a lot taller than it appeared from ground level. My ladder only reached about two-thirds of the way up the tree. I thought for a minute and said to myself, “No problem. I'll just cut off the top one-third of the tree.” So I put on all my safety gear (as any smart Ground Safety professional would) and up I went like Paul Bunyan — this was exciting stuff!

The first problem I encountered was that I had forgotten I really don't care for heights. I became incredibly nervous. The second problem was the diameter of the tree at that level was approximately 10-inches. Remember, the saw was made to cut only 4-inch diameter branches. At this point, my inner voice was asking if this was such a good idea. I hesitated for a second, then said to myself, “I've come this far; there's no turning back now.”

I turned on the chainsaw and started a horizontal cut. Initially, it went fairly well until I was about midway through the tree. At this

point the weight of the tree started to bind the chainsaw blade. Now what? I'm ashamed to say my next decision was to push the top third of the tree over while standing on top of my 20-foot extension ladder. At this point, all my fellow Ground Safety folks should be cringing.

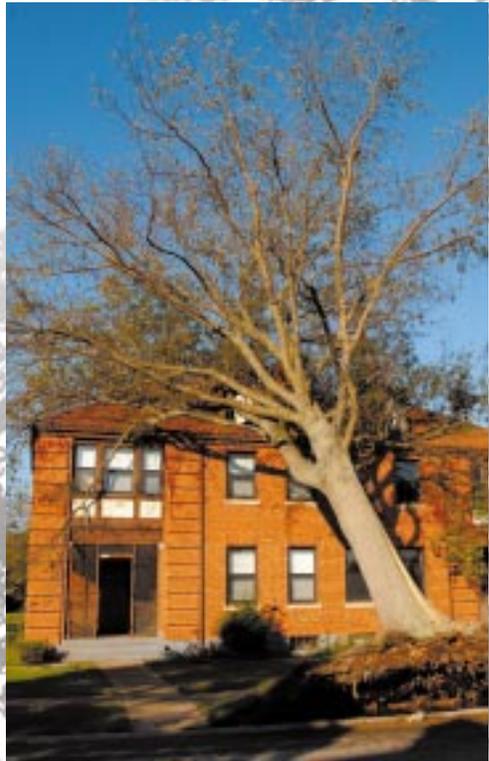
I pushed and pushed with all my might and, although the tree shook and swayed, it would not fall. (Someone was definitely looking out for me that day!) Now I only had one option left. I would have to tie a rope around the treetop and pull it over. When I realized my wife would be home soon, I decided I had to hurry because the last thing I wanted to hear was, “I told you so.”

So I tied the rope around the tree and stood in a spot off to the side, ensuring I had enough ground clearance to stay safe when the tree fell. I pulled and rocked the treetop with all my might and — to my surprise — it gradually started to lean very slowly. Of course, I continued to pull. The treetop moved in slow motion at first. Then it suddenly fell so fast I could hardly tell what happened next. As it hit the ground, it snapped up in a strange motion to the side and was coming right at me. I jumped back as fast as I could possibly react, but the extending branches still struck me, and I was knocked on the seat of my pants.

I had a few scratches from the branches, but thankfully I was fine — except of course for my pride. It was at that point that I mumbled to myself, “I should have hired a professional.” 

Safe Pruning Tips

If you don't hire a professional, keep in mind that safety – for you personally – should be top priority as you prune



- Be sure you are in good physical and mental health in order to operate the equipment safely.
- Do not use equipment when under the influence of alcohol, medication, or substances that can affect your vision, dexterity, and judgment.
- Before using any power equipment, be sure to thoroughly read and understand the safety and operator's manuals.
- When pruning deep in a bush or tree with hand pruners, pay attention to where your non-cutting hand is. It's easy to cut your hand when you can't see it.
- Before attempting to prune from a ladder, look up for electrical lines and dead or hanging branches.
- Consider where the branch will fall when it is cut or dropped from the tree – be sure it won't fall on anyone or knock into the ladder.
- Be safe. Use a stepladder or tie an extension ladder securely to the tree and keep one hand on it and one on the saw. Station someone on the ground as a lookout and safety checker.
- Wear nonskid rubber-soled shoes, snug clothing, and leather gloves. When using a chain saw, wear leather boots. Professionals wear hard hats and protective glasses because it is easy to bump into a branch and scratch an eye or lose a contact lens.

Editor's note: www.gardenadvice.com and <http://static.highbeam.com/> (Pruning Safety Is Top Priority by Robin Pendergrast, Arbor Age, April 1, 2000)