

# Cutting Difficult Trees

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Last year I had a professional tree service cut down two trees in the forest. While Mike usually does all the tree cutting and firewood preparation, and I help as I can, both these trees were beyond our comfort zone. One was a tall Poplar next to the wire fence at the back of the property. It had cracked at the base and was hanging on by a narrow edge of trunk, its top leaning against a nearby tall Poplar. Not only did we fear that it might crash onto the wire fence, destroying part of it, it was hung up and hanging onto the base in such a strange way that it looked dangerous to tackle. Mike said there was a lot of torque and tension in it; the tree service foreman said it was a “widow maker,” a term I had first heard used by my father, who had been a lumberjack for a while in the ‘50s.

The other challenge was a spreading 65-foot tall dead Elm that was too close to interesting specimen trees that we want to keep, as well as

being near my new neighbours’ property, who wouldn’t appreciate a huge tree falling onto their back yard. This tree needed to be taken down carefully, avoiding damage.

It took the crew of three cutters all morning to drop both trees on this cold winter day. A lot of time was spent studying the trees’ leans and possible options for dealing with them. A long rope was attached to the top of the Poplar, and two crew members pulled it sideways, away from the fence while the foreman cautiously cut what remained attached to the stump. While it might have kicked up or twisted in any direction, it actually fell smoothly and safely to the ground.

## Reducing the Elm

After restorative cups of coffee and tea in the warmth of my kitchen, the crew and I headed back out to the Elm. I had thought this huge tree would be cut to fall into the cedar forest, away from everything we wanted to keep. The damage would have been to a lot of Cedars but we have plenty of them and they grow and spread relatively quickly,

► Although the leaning Poplar wasn’t large, it had cracked in a dangerous way, close to the fence and needed careful pulling to bring it down safely where desired.

so it didn’t seem to matter. It mattered to the foreman. He studied the tree and available spaces between surrounding trees, and came up with another plan.

Soon the youngest man was rigged up in climbing gear, a chainsaw dangling from his belt. Up he walked to where the trunk had divided into three smaller trunks, while the rest of the crew threw a long rope up to the top of one of them. They were going to reduce the huge tree by taking down two of the spreading trunks, separately. The crew on the ground pulled a trunk in the preferred direction of fall while the man up the tree sawed it off. It fell neatly where it was supposed to, beside some Cedars. A rope was attached to the second trunk, the ground crew pulled, the climber cut, the trunk crashed down beside the first.

Next, the rest of the tree had to come down, but in the completely opposite direction. The climber came off the tree. A long rope went up to the top. Two crew members held the rope while the foreman took responsibility for cutting the great trunk at the bottom. After sawing the “V” on the side near the desired direction of fall, and cutting through the back side, nothing happened. Although the crew pulled on the rope, they couldn’t bring the tree down. The foreman had to join them, adding his weight and strength to the pull, and then the tree came down slowly where they wanted it.



## Bucking Up the Trunk

It was a great morning’s work. All we had needed was their service in safely bringing down the trees. Mike could cut up the trees at his leisure.

So on Saturday, Mike borrowed a friend’s extra-long chainsaw, suitable for cutting through huge trunks. In a surprisingly short amount of time, he bucked up the Elm into firewood-length chunks, clearing the path for walking. The biggest chunks will need to be split for firewood, which can be done in warm weather. We can often get help from friends for a work party to help split, move and stack firewood.

This leaves the back Poplar to be cut away from the path across which it lies. Not great for firewood, it can be left to disintegrate and feed the forest.

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▲ It was starting to snow heavily by the time the dead Elm was brought down