

A Photo Guide to Widow-Makers

Safety First



What Are Widow-Makers?

Widow-makers are dead trees or limbs, especially those that have broken off and hang suspended in a tree. In a breeze they can come crashing down with lethal force. People standing beneath them have no time to react.

Keep alert for widow-makers whenever you hike or camp in the woods. When you see one, your best defense is to avoid the area.

Widow-makers are most likely to fall on windy days. When the breeze picks up, stay out of the woods.

The upcoming slides show examples of widow-makers to watch out for whenever you visit your woodlot.



Broken, suspended branches are the most common type of widow-maker.

Widow-makers can be tough to spot, especially in a thick canopy. Be on the lookout for light-colored wood, like from the inside of a branch. That's a big sign that the limb has broken off the tree.





Widow-makers can be huge! This dead chunk of pine is a foot across and weighs several hundred pounds, yet it's suspended only by a notch in a white oak. It wouldn't take much to make it fall.



Broken limbs don't need to be large to be dangerous. Even a 3-inch-wide branch can be lethal.

Branches don't need to be broken to be dangerous. Dead limbs on live trees can break off at any time. Keep alert for these limbs, especially where they overhang a campsite or trail like in this photo.





Snow and ice loads weigh down limbs and make them more likely to break. Keep out of your woods immediately after winter storms.



Whole trees can be widow-makers. When trees die and fall, they can become trapped in another tree (right circle). As the stump decays (bottom circle), the suspended tree can crash to the ground.



More than wind can knock over dead trees. Just touching or leaning against a decaying tree like this one can cause it to fall.



Live trees can be widow-makers too if they lean at a steep angle. Their own weight can pull them down. Don't put your campsite beneath the tree on the right.



Certain tree-thinning practices can create window-makers. Girdling weakens the tree trunk and makes the tree more vulnerable to snapping off at the base.



This girdled tree snapped off in high winds. Someone standing nearby would not have had time to respond before the tree hit them.

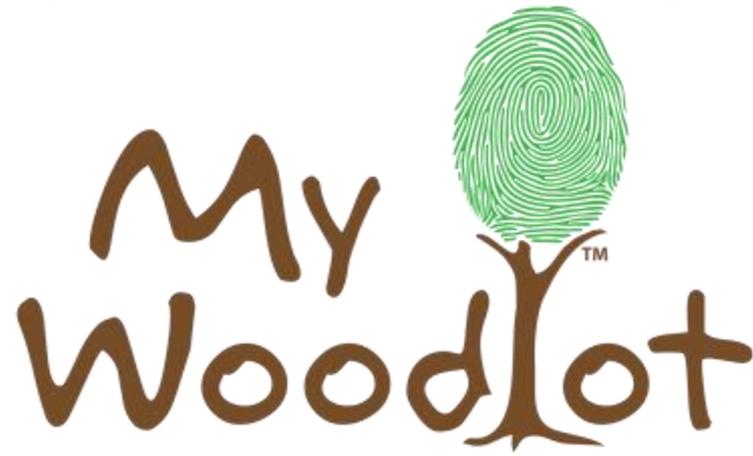


Sometimes during logging a cut tree will become “hung up” in another tree. These trees are especially unstable and can fall at any time.

A Wrap-Up Caveat

Although widow-makers are hazardous, don't feel the need to remove all dead trees from your woods. Dead trees provide homes and food for many animals, and having a few is important for any healthy woodlot.

Rather than try to eliminate widow-makers, keep alert for them and give them a wide berth. Avoid walking or camping under dead or suspended trees and branches, and stay at least 1 ½ times the height of the tree away from any dead tree on your land.



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