

DOG YARD TREE

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11-JUL-2005

INTRODUCTION

We had noticed a lot of shelf fungus in the middle reaches of this birch tree and were worried that it might come down onto our power line or hit our dogs. But the tree still seemed reasonably healthy, so we didn't do anything about it. Last night (June 10th, 2005) a huge wind storm came through Fairbanks and in addition to knocking out our power for more than five hours, it took down the top third of this tree.



removing limbs

It broke off just above the section with the largest concentration of fungus, and was not only connected to the trunk by a thin section of living wood, but it was hung up on two healthy branches. I was worried that it would release at some point in the near future when it would almost certainly destroy the section of the dog yard fence below it.

The image on the left shows me removing some of the upper limbs in an attempt to get the broken section to come down. To get a sense of scale, that's a twenty-four foot ladder, and I'm about three rungs from the top of it. I used a bow saw and an antique broad hatchet to bring down the limbs within reach of the ladder.



side view

The image on the right shows a side view of the tree. You can see the dog yard fence running between the section that's come down and the trunk of the tree. The top of the tree is resting on an old chicken coop that's behind the dog yard. There haven't been chickens in it for years, and it has been partially destroyed by heavy snowfalls and a lack of maintenance.

My neighbor came over to help out and we concluded that, if we cut off the ends of the branches that were resting on the chicken coop, the top of the tree might come down. I cut all of them off, but nothing changed. Next, we attached a rope near the top of the broken section and used a rope winch to try to pull the broken part off the limbs that were holding it up. Still no luck.

We finally decided that we should take the fence apart and take down the entire tree. We would be removing the tree anyway, so we might as well get it done now. And, felling the entire tree (assuming we could get it to fall in the proper direction) would be much safer than climbing up the tree to cut off the limbs that were holding up the broken section.

I have a lot of experience cutting down trees, but my neighbor is a true expert. The tree was very large, 20 inches in diameter at its greatest width, so I let him take it down with his chainsaw. He cut a wedge about a quarter of the way through the tree on the side facing the chicken coop, and then cut a little over one

third of the way through the other side, carefully sawing so the ends of the cut were aligned with the ends of the wedge on the other side. Normally when doing this, you stop after cutting a third of the way and use wedges in the back-side cut to force the tree over toward the wedge side. In our case, the tree was already leaning that direction, so as he continued the cut, the tree started leaning more, opening the back-side cut. Once it started moving, he killed his saw and backed away from the tree.

The tree fell exactly where we wanted it to, completely destroying the chicken coop in the process. It came down with an enormous bang. My neighbor cut off a couple sections from the end, and we put the fence back up. No dogs, power lines or property were harmed, and now I've got many many hours of cutting and chopping. The first fifteen or twenty feet of the trunk are healthy, as is the top of the tree. I'll get a lot of firewood out of it, and perhaps even some wood for turnings.

The end result can be seen on the right in a photo taken from our guest bedroom on the second floor.

All photos were taken by my wife, Andrea Swingle^[1].



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^[1] <http://www.outdoor-exposures.com>