



Can you identify this tree? See page 5 for the answer.

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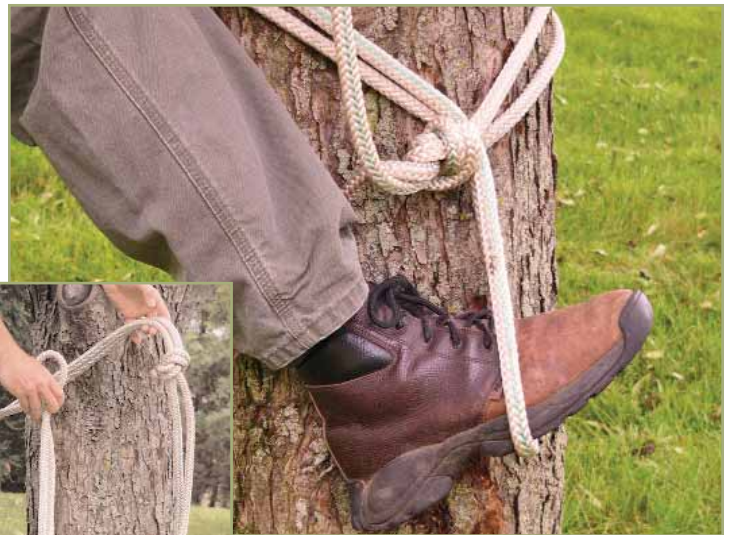
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Reducing the Hazard of Climbing Falls

It's one of the leading causes of tree worker fatalities. Falls out of trees rank somewhere close behind struck-by's and electrocution, so if you are a climber, don't be content thinking that a 6,000 pound tensile strength climbing line and your cat-like strength and balance are going to save the day for you. **Stuff happens!**



Photos: Richard May, TCIA

Let's look at the fundamentals of climbing safely:

Mind your equipment and your knots. Check all parts of your climbing system daily before use, paying special attention to parts that take the most abuse, such as your climbing line and your prusik line/loop or split tail. You literally should be able to tie any knot or hitch in your climbing system with your eyes closed, so practice them on the ground until you can do that and before you use them aloft. Also, don't attempt rope splicing unless you really know what you're doing. Your life depends on it, so make the investment for professional splicing.

Careful where you clip in. Unclipping and clipping your lanyard is done so often that it becomes second nature. You literally do it without looking. You might think it's the sign of a seasoned climber, but it's really the sign of a complacent climber, and it's something else. In behavioral safety parlance it's known as "Eyes not on task," one of the four leading critical errors in behavior that lead to accidents. Climbers have unknowingly clipped into accessory biners or rings intended for equipment that were positioned close to their side D.

To form a stirrup hitch, grab a long bight from the tail of your climb line, pass it around the trunk or limb to measure and tie an overhand knot (photo inset). Pass it back around the stem and feed the end between the two rope parts coming out of the know so that a "stirrup" is formed for your foot. It lends stability when there's nothing else to stand on.

Don't use your line for any purpose except climbing and don't be afraid to give it an early retirement. The ANSI Z133 Standard says it's OK to raise and lower hand tools with your line, but that's it.

Tie, dress and set your knots and hitches. Tie means forming the knot, dress means aligning the parts the way they should be, and set means tightening it up so that it functions as intended. Some knots tend to loosen and should be periodically checked.

Start by being secured, and stay that way. "Secure" means belayed by another person; self-belayed with a system that prevents you from falling if you let go; being tied in with an accepted climbing knot or hitch; or being home in bed with the door locked.

...continued on page 2

...Reducing the Hazard of Climbing Falls, continued from page 1.

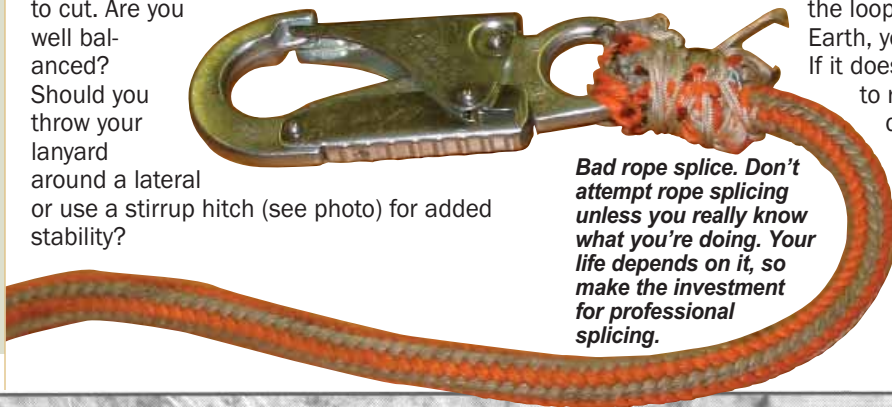
...don't be content thinking that a 6,000 pound tensile strength climbing line and your cat-like strength and balance are going to save the day for you. Stuff happens!

Redundancy is a good thing, redundancy is a good thing. Redundancy means having a rope backup for mechanical ascenders, because mechanical devices can fail. It means having two means of being secured, typically your line and your lanyard, when you're in the tree and when the occasion calls for it, using both at the same time. It means backing up your taut-line hitch (if you use one) with a figure-8 knot or even an overhand knot, because the taut-line will roll out!

Pretend your chain saw is a hot knife and your climbing line is butter. If your work habits bring your saw chain really close to your line, change your work habits. Dry run your cut to check your stability: With the saw off or idling, hold it up to where you intend to cut. Are you well balanced? Should you throw your lanyard around a lateral or use a stirrup hitch (see photo) for added stability?

A big, uncontrolled swing is as bad as a fall. Never ever climb above your tie-in point! Always be mindful of your rope angle as well as the length that's paid out between you and your tie-in point. When that combination is adding up to the potential for a big swing, use a technique to reduce the hazard such as natural or man-made re-directs or double-crotching. (See this month's Mr. Safety.)

Make sure your rope reaches the ground. At the very least it's embarrassing to reach the end of your line before your feet hit the ground or worse yet, descend right off the end of your line and crash to the ground in a heap. Test whether you can safely descend by pulling up the tail of your line, holding onto the end and dropping the loop down. If the loop touches Mother Earth, you're good to go. If it doesn't, you will have to re-crotch on your descent, after lanyarding in of course!



Bad rope splice. Don't attempt rope splicing unless you really know what you're doing. Your life depends on it, so make the investment for professional splicing.



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