



Developing chainsaw sense can prevent

By Bill Kohlbrand

If you're an inexperienced woodcutter, these tips can help you get a job done more easily yet more safely. Always read your owner's manual, which has critical information to keep you safe and make the saw last longer. If you know an experienced woodcutter, try to get them to mentor you. This article can't begin to teach you to be a great cutter, but these tips will hasten the learning process.

1 Safety Gear

Before starting a saw and when cutting firewood, always wear personal protective equipment. They include hardhat, ear protection, eye protection, leather gloves, long-sleeve shirt, long pants, saw chaps, and leather boots. An axe

and falling wedges are a necessity, and a special felling tool can make the job easier. The felling tool (see photograph page 25) has a steel lever for lifting the tree over and a cant hook for rolling a tree while bucking or for rolling a tree hung up in another tree. For safety's sake, "partnerup" when felling trees and have a first aid kit and cell phone in case of emergency. For tips on felling trees, see story page 24.

2 Saw Technique

When felling a tree, establish a safety circle, typically twice the height of the tree. Keep anyone and anything out of the area not supposed to be there. Always keep both hands on the saw. The right hand runs the throttle at the rear of the saw, and the left hand

grasps the front handlebar with the thumb wrapped around the handlebar securely! Many saw injuries occur when the left hand slips off of the handlebar into the chain. Running a saw left-handed is extremely hazardous. It puts the chain perilously close to your thigh. Left-handers need to run the throttle with their right hand, and hold the front handle with their left hand, just like righties!

Footing is important. Maintaining good balance and a solid base help prevent over-reaching, which stresses the back and inhibits escape if necessary. Use your thumb to run the throttle when the saw is on its side. The saw has multiple pivot points. It saves wear and tear on your back if you can use the log as a table.

Use pivot points when limbing, and use bucking teeth, which attach to the front of the saw that helps stabilize the saw as you cut (many saws have these as standard equipment) if available. Let the saw do the work. A properly maintained saw will feed itself into the wood – don't try to push it through the wood. Accelerate the saw as you enter the wood. Sharp, fast chains are safer than dull or slow ones.

3 Leveling the Saw

Learn to level the saw by feel. Balance a plastic foam cup full of water on the tip of the bar. Hold the saw level, and remove the cup. Let the rear handle go, and note how much you have to raise or lower the rear and where to hold the front handlebar



injuries and make wood cutting easier

to keep the saw level. A few minutes doing this will pay huge dividends in the field. Modern saws have good balance, but they are all different, and you have to find it for your saw. Do not cut with the upper top quadrant of the bar tip because it exposes you to dangerous kickback. Avoid cutting with the engine above your shoulders.

Cutting wood is about compression and tension. In most cases, one side of a tree, log, or limb has a force trying to tear the wood open and the other side is trying to compress the wood. When limbing or bucking (cutting the main bole or trunk of the tree into pieces of a desired length),

watch the saw kerf (the opening made as the saw cuts). If it keeps opening, keep cutting. If it starts to close, draw the saw out and cut from the other side. Always try to estimate how the tree will react to the cuts you make, but be ready to do something different if you guess wrong.

4 Limbing

5 Once the tree is on the ground, you need to cut the limbs off. Generally, limbs that hang unsupported should be cut from the top down, and limbs putting pressure on the ground should be cut from the bottom up. Watch the saw kerf, and, if you see it start to close, pull out and

go from the other way. If pinched, don't try to yank the saw out. Open the kerf by lifting the log with a pole or falling tool, or by putting downward pressure to open the kerf. You can damage your saw by pulling too hard on it. It's best to limb from the uphill side of the tree, even better if the log is on your right side.

6 Bucking

7 Once the limbs are off, buck the log into usable pieces. Start from the top of the tree down to simplify the process. Cutting from the uphill side of the tree is usually better. If the end of the log is unsupported, cut from the top down (bottom bind). You can prevent

slabbing (when gravity pulls a log apart faster than the saw can cut it) of the wood by making a small kerf cut on the lower (compression) side and then cutting down from the top. This will form a hinge of wood. If the log is supported at both ends, cut from the bottom up (top bind). Again, you can prevent slabbing by making a small kerf cut on the top (compression) side and finishing from the bottom up. Always watch the kerf as you cut in case you guessed the bind wrong. There are other binds, such as side bind and end bind, that will affect logs. Adjust your cuts to keep from being pinched and, more importantly, from being injured by shifting logs.

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