



# PanorArbor

## 360° Tree Care

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### **Retention of Dead Branches in Trees and Associated Woody Debris on Property**

While it has been mentioned briefly among communication with the Save Shoreline Trees group, I would like to highlight another important factor in preserving 'habitat' for birds and mammals that is often not considered by property owners, which is the retention of dead branches and stems in trees.

It is unfortunately very common for arborists and tree services to recommend what is often referred to as 'crown cleaning', 'dead-wooding' or 'safety pruning' which is quite simply removing all dead, broken and hung-up branches and stems from a tree. This comes from a combination of learned behaviour from less ecologically minded arborists, as well as companies finding easy ways to sell work, basing the recommendation to remove dead wood as "for the health of the tree" or for safety purposes. While there is certainly sense in removing unstable portions of the tree to reduce the chances of property damage or injury to people or pets, in many cases the dead branches are perfectly stable and therefore relatively low risk and can remain in a tree's canopy for many years, generally breaking apart naturally from the tip inwards over time, or perhaps falling out during heavy rain and/or wind events, when generally people or pets are not relaxing under a tree.

It is important to leave as much of the tree intact at all times as these varying degrees of natural decomposition provide an excellent source of food for birds and mammals in the way of insects that slowly help break down the wood fibers as well as fungal 'fruiting bodies' that provide essential symbiotic relationships with the tree and surrounding ecosystem. The same is for branches that fall to the ground, live or dead, just like leaves and needles that all slowly break down into the freshest and most nutrient rich soil and compost available. Removing woody debris from our gardens and raking up leaves is the worst thing to do for helping create a lush and vibrant habitat for all forms of life both visible and invisible.

Dead branches can also be used for nesting material for birds and mammals which is another great reason for leaving them in your trees and on your property. It is often reported both in literature about pruning and by tree service salespeople, that dead branches need to be removed from trees to prevent the spread of disease and for the improved health of a tree. This is not true as the process of 'walling off' branches that are not needed, already prevents any disease or fungal infections getting into the tree and is usually the cause of the decline in the first instance. Trees are self-optimizing beings and shedding branches is common and often a response to stress, shading or simply a way of protecting the main trunk of the tree from excessive forces during windstorms for example. Anyway, before I go off subject and into why thinning trees is bad, I will return to the point that dead branches should be left in trees unless there is a specific reason to remove them. I have worked in older trees with large dead stems which have been used by woodpeckers for nests while the rest of the tree is relatively healthy and so they get the best of both worlds as they have additional protection from predators as well as a very local source of food and nesting material and a place to call home.