

## Rotting Logs

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Trees are like people. They die from diseases, infections, injuries, burns, drowning, malnutrition, and sometimes just plain old age. Walking thru the woods we see, here and there, dead or dying trees of various kinds. For example: a big white oak, with its bark ripped from crown to root, was literally cooked by a bolt of lightning during a summer thunderstorm. In a grove of black oaks, many are dying lingering deaths from infected wounds started years ago when an autumn fire swept thru the fallen leaves and scorched the living wood. In a dense forest there are many that have lost the battle for space and sunlight. In some places we see trees that are slowly starving because dashing rains have carried away the fertile topsoil and the trampling feet of picnickers have injured the shallow roots that bring them food.

In our forest preserve picnic areas, for public safety, we remove dead trees but elsewhere we let them stand until they fall and then rot where they lie. A lot of people think that is both untidy and wasteful but there is an important reason for it. In order to restore or maintain a healthy natural woodland and all of the wheels within wheels of the living machinery that makes it tick, those slowly decaying trunks, branches and twigs are vitally necessary. It would be a strange forest without them.

A forest is more than trees. The trees are the framework but around them is woven an unbelievable complex fabric of life: squirrels, mice, birds, bees, beetles, worms, wildflowers, weeds, mushrooms and many, many more. Over a period of years a slowly enlarging hole in a standing dead snag, for instance, may be occupied in turn by a fungus, a boring beetle, a colony of carpenter ants, a woodpecker, a deer mouse, a squirrel, a screech owl, and a racoon. The dead roots, the loosening bark and the softening trunk also shelter or feed a host of other wood colonists. The roots gradually weaken until one day, in a gust of wind, the snag crashes to the ground where the final act of the drama takes place.

Some fallen trees rot much more rapidly than others, depending upon the kind of tree and whether or not it lies in contact with damp soil. Bacteria and the root-like threads of fungi — whose fruits are mushrooms — spread inward thru pores and crevices in the dead wood, eating away some of it and leaving the remainder soft. The mushroom growths on the outside of the rotting log may include several sizes, shapes and colors: bracket types, puffballs, parasols, and some resembling a turkey gobbler's tail, oyster shells, or crusts.

There is little hint of the wealth of small animal life within until you pull off a big piece of loose bark. Ants, centipedes, millipedes, daddy-long-legs and beetles scurry away. On the exposed wood are artistic patterns made by the engraver beetle. A fiery red mite may creep under a shred of bark. Soon there is left no visible sign of life except tunnels into the softened wood and perhaps a silk-covered ball of spider eggs hidden in a crack.

Now roll the log over. On the moist underside there are likely to be sow bugs, slugs, snails, earthworms, spiders, crickets, firefly larvae and various beetles. There may be a salamander or two, a toad, a harmless snake, and a mouse's nest with her store of seeds.

At this season all of these creatures are in their winter sleep, so be sure to roll the log back in place. Living and dying, generation after generation of them convert that wood back into soil and humus which a healthy forest must have.

There is drama and treasure in a rotting log.

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## Guest Editorials

### ANTIPOLLUTION DEVICE

(Augusta, Ga., Chronicle)

When you survey the possible means of replacing pollution with cleaner, fresher air, don't overlook trees.

This is true of forests being grown for cutting, and renewed systematically.

That's right, trees. According to Jack Davis, Canada's minister of fisheries and forests, woodlands can be one of the best antipollution devices. Each acre of young, vigorous forest area, he says, produces not only four tons of wood per year, but also takes in 12 tons of carbon dioxide and turns out four tons of oxygen.

It is not true of old, declining trees in wilderness areas. As trees become overmature and begin to decay, intake of carbon dioxide declines. Rot means oxidation, so trees take more oxygen from the air.

This has significance for Georgia and South Carolina, with their well-managed, young and vigorous commercial woodlands. In addition to the benefit of the economy, of stabilization of water runoff, to better wildlife habitat and to recreation. They also can help restore the clean air which in recent years has been threatened by air pollution.

"The Government is my shepherd, I need not work. It allows me to lie down on good jobs, it destroyeth my initiative, it leadeth me in the paths of the parasite for politic's sake. Yea, though I walk thru the valley of laziness and deficit spending, I will fear no evil; for the Government is with me; its doles and its vote-getters they comfort me. It prepareth an economic utopia for us by appropriating the earnings of my grandchildren. It filleth my head with bologna; my inefficiency runneth over. Surely the government shall care for me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in fool's paradise forever."