How to Spot and Remove Deadwood Over Your Driveway or Walkway

Why Deadwood Over a Driveway or Walkway Matters

When a tree canopy extends over a driveway or walkway, the branches above can become a hazard. Deadwood - branches that have died but remain attached - is especially dangerous because it can fall without warning. A falling branch can damage a vehicle, injure a person, or block access to your property. Regular inspection and removal of deadwood in these zones is a key part of roof clearance pruning, which aims to keep trees safe and structures clear. This article walks you through the steps to identify deadwood over a driveway or walkway, what to watch for at each stage, and when to call a professional.

Step 1: Assess the Area and the Tree

Start by standing at a safe distance from the tree. Look at the overall shape of the canopy. Dead branches often stand out because they lack leaves or needles, or their bark is peeling. In deciduous trees, deadwood is easiest to spot in late fall or winter when the tree is bare. In evergreens, look for branches that are brown or gray instead of green. Walk the length of the driveway or walkway and note every branch that crosses directly overhead. Pay attention to branches that hang low enough to brush a vehicle or a person walking underneath. These are the ones that need the closest inspection.

Step 2: Identify Signs of Deadwood

Deadwood has several telltale signs. Look for branches that have no buds or leaves during the growing season. The bark may be loose, cracked, or missing entirely. On conifers, dead branches often shed their needles and become brittle. On hardwoods, deadwood may have a gray, weathered appearance. Another clue is the presence of fungi, such as shelf fungi or conks, growing on the branch. These indicate decay inside the wood. Also check for cracks, splits, or wounds where the branch meets the trunk or a larger limb. A branch that is rubbing against another branch or a structure is also a candidate for removal, as the friction can create wounds that invite disease.

What to watch for at this step:

- Bark that is peeling or missing in patches
- Branches that are brittle and snap easily when bent
- Discoloration or a lack of leaves in season

- Fungal growth on the branch surface
- Cracks or splits near the branch collar

Step 3: Check the Branch Collar and Attachment Point

The branch collar is the swollen area where a branch joins the trunk or a larger limb. A healthy branch has a smooth, well-defined collar. Deadwood often has a compromised collar: the bark may be sunken, discolored, or missing. If you see a crack running through the collar, the branch is likely weakened and at risk of falling. Also look for included bark, where the branch grows into the trunk without a proper collar, creating a weak joint. This is common in trees with multiple trunks or tight crotches. Branches with included bark are more prone to failure, especially under wind or snow load.

View the location on Google Maps

Step 4: Evaluate the Risk to Property and People

Not every dead branch needs immediate removal. The priority is branches that pose a threat to the driveway, walkway, or structures below. Consider the size of the branch: a dead branch that is less than two inches in diameter is less likely to cause serious damage, while larger branches can be dangerous. Also think about the height: a branch that is 20 feet up will fall with more force than one at 10 feet. Look at the condition of the rest of the tree. A tree that is already leaning, has multiple dead limbs, or shows signs of root decay may be a candidate for removal rather than just pruning. If you are unsure, it is best to consult a professional who can assess the tree's overall health.

Step 5: Decide Whether to DIY or Call a Professional

Small dead branches that are within reach from the ground can often be removed with a pruning saw or loppers. But for branches that are high up, near power lines, or large in diameter, the work is best left to a qualified tree service. Climbing a ladder with a saw is risky: a falling branch can knock you off balance, and working at height without proper safety gear is dangerous. Additionally, improper cuts can damage the tree and invite disease. A professional arborist has the training and equipment to prune safely and correctly. For example, Ball Ground Tree Service provides tree trimming and pruning including deadwood removal, roof and driveway clearance, structural pruning, and storm preparation. They can evaluate the tree on site and recommend the best course of action.

Step 6: Perform the Pruning (If You Are Comfortable and Safe)

If you decide to remove a small dead branch yourself, follow proper pruning techniques. Use sharp, clean tools to make a clean cut. Cut just outside the branch collar, but do not cut into it. The collar helps the tree heal. For a branch that is less than an inch in diameter, a single cut is fine. For larger branches, use the three-cut method to avoid tearing the bark. First, make an undercut on the underside of the branch, a few inches from the collar. Second, cut through the branch from the top, a few inches farther out. Third, remove the stub by cutting just outside the collar. Never top the tree or cut branches flush with the trunk. Topping creates wounds that invite decay and leads to weak regrowth.

What to watch for during pruning:

- Do not cut into the branch collar
- Do not leave a long stub
- Do not prune during active growth if the tree is stressed
- Do not work alone if using a ladder
- Do not prune near power lines - call the utility company

Step 7: Inspect Regularly and Plan for Storm Preparation

Deadwood can develop quickly, especially after a storm, a drought, or an insect infestation. Make it a habit to inspect the canopy over your driveway and walkway at least twice a year: once in early spring before leaves emerge, and again in late fall after leaves drop. After a severe storm, check for new deadwood, cracks, or hanging branches. If you notice a pattern of deadwood forming, it may indicate a larger problem, such as root damage or a disease. In that case, a professional evaluation is wise. Incorporating deadwood removal into your regular roof clearance pruning routine can reduce the risk of damage during high winds or heavy snow. For homeowners in Ball Ground and Cherokee County, local conditions like summer storms and occasional ice events make this kind of proactive care especially important.

Ball Ground Tree Service is also on Instagram.

When to Call a Professional

If you are unsure about the safety of a branch, or if the deadwood is high, large, or near a structure, call a tree service for an on-site evaluation. A qualified arborist can identify hazards that an untrained eye might miss, such as hidden decay or unstable root systems. They also have the equipment to remove branches safely without damaging the tree or your property. For example, Ball Ground Tree Service offers on-site evaluations to determine whether a tree needs pruning, monitoring, or removal. They serve residential and acreage properties in Ball Ground and Cherokee County, Georgia.

Ball Ground Tree Service is located at Bldg 100, 2220 Airport Industrial Dr, Ball Ground, GA 30107. You can reach them at +1 770-697-9222.