



Cottage Memories

Chronicles of A City Boy's Life In The Country

MY SUMMER HANG OUT

Cottage bliss is a lazy summer afternoon in a gently swaying hammock. Aficionados of hanging out appreciate a hammock's stress relieving powers. For me, the appeal is work put on hold – although it can be difficult to ignore the wife's "To Do List" tacked to a nearby tree trunk.

But hammocks don't make good beds. Anyone who has been forced to sleep in one can testify to its shortcomings. Being slung in a sack overnight creates unheard of spinal configurations. It's uncomfortable for side-sleepers or dozing facedown – and if you already think your significant other takes their half of the bed from the middle, try doubling up in a hammock for the night! To say nothing of the sheer panic of attempting a dignified exit from your hammock when suddenly woken by an urgent call of nature.

My dream was a traditional hammock, made for slinging between two tree trunks. Not one with a self-supporting stand, whose assembly can be embarrassing for a man who's all thumbs. But at least, all their parts are pre-designed to fit properly. Unlike tree-hangers, which assume that every buyer has two trunks exactly the right distance apart.

Yes, tree hanging hammocks call for advance planning. The best way is to make sure your great, great grandfather planted two strong trees exactly eight and a half feet apart. Failing this, measure the space between every tree before purchasing your cottage. And be very careful what trees you take down. Otherwise, it's improvise-city.

The first problem is attachment. Tying a rope around each trunk seemed obvious, but bark slippage can plummet an unsuspecting hammocker to the ground in short order. Usually, just as I'm dozing off. That's why I highly recommend placing an old mattress underneath for softer landings.

Hooks were plan 'B' and several crash-landings later I owned a supply of industrial ones. They should keep me suspended for eternity – as long as I can keep my two rambunctious Huskies out of the hammock while I'm in it.

Hammock placement is also a critical consideration. Which brings us back to the distance between trees. Too close and the hooks were so high that under my weight, the hammock sagged into a claustrophobic sack. Fine for counting toes, but hard to turn pages, and hell with two canines squiggling aboard.

Hooks too low meant derriere dragging on the ground and friction burns from swinging – another good reason for that mattress. Hooks too far apart, and the hammock ropes weren't long enough to reach both trees simultaneously. Rope extensions or hooks screwed in only half-way both turned into disastrous experiments. Winching slightly too far apart saplings closer together added the risk of a sudden catapult into the lake if anything gave way. Besides, wearing a PFD is uncomfortable in a hammock.

A hammock supported at only one end is indeed a sorry and useless device. After numerous flipperoonies and much dirt eating, I asked the wife to hold the unsupported end one afternoon. I assumed the answer wasn't a resounding "yes" when she wandered off to answer the phone and never returned. Strange how that phone always rings just as I come up with another brainstorm.

Using a design app, I finally reached the perfect tree width to hook-height to distance-apart to body-weight ratio. My property survey revealed six ideal tree candidates and I chose two beside the lake. With everything in place, I ensconced myself aboard. But after all this rigamarole, something was missing.

I wasn't moving! The air was still - no wind, no sway. A hammock without swing is like a boat without water. Reviewing my options, I quickly decided that the frantic motion created by dogs trying to climb into each side of the hammock at the same time was more furious hurricane than gentle breeze. I also abandoned the idea of asking the wife to fan me with a giant palm frond because she'd probably be on the phone again. Besides, she seems to be enjoying watching over me from her chaise lounge up on the deck.

So I tied another rope around a nearby sapling and gently pulled to sway myself back and forth. Now all I have to do keep dodging the droppings from the bird nest overhead, and stop worrying about how to get out of this crazy contraption without breaking my neck. Maybe I should just leave hammocking to the hounds.

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