Observations: Stem is flexible. There are soft buds at the branch tips. When bark is scraped it is green underneath.

Conclusions: This plant is still alive. It is a woody perennial from which the leaves fall every year but new leaf buds form in the winter and become new leaves in spring.
Dead or Alive?

Observations: It is summer. Leaves are dead, stem is brittle and broken. There are no buds at the tips. When the bark is scraped it is brown underneath.

Conclusions: This plant is dead. It will probably not grow back from its roots. Now it is a good source of woody debris for decomposers.
Observations: Branches, leaves and stems are brittle and dry. At the base of the stems there are green leaves.

Conclusions: This plant is still alive. It is an herbaceous perennial, which means it dies back every year but sends out new shoots in spring.
Observations: Branches are brown. Leaves are brown. There is no new growth at the base. It is the middle of winter.

Conclusions: This plant may still be alive; sometimes the roots are still alive, even if the top isn’t. Wait until midsummer to see if it grows new leaves.