

Firewise Planting Tips

Fire can provide a beneficial role in our natural landscape by cleaning and revitalizing aging vegetation. However, fires aren't limited to natural surroundings and can make their way into our neighborhoods, thus posing a threat to lives and homes.

The location of your home can impact your risk. Are you nestled in a canyon or on a slope? Are houses close together? Are you surrounded by dense foliage?

When you were landscaping your home, if you knew your choice of plant material could minimize your risk to fire damage or make you more likely to lose your home in the event of a fire, would you think twice as to the plants you surround yourself with?

Defensible space is the base around your home that will give firefighters a fighting chance against fire. It means clearing all dry grass, brush and dead leaves at least 30 feet from your home, and at least 150 feet if you're on a hill.

The key here is "at least." Your local fire department may ask for greater clearance. Contact them for requirements in your area. Defensible space and a fire safe landscape don't mean a ring of bare dirt around your home. When establishing your landscape, keep trees furthest from your house, shrubs can be closer, and bedding plants and lawns are nearest the house.

The following Steps to Safeguarding your home can help minimize your risk.

Selective Thinning of Vegetation. Remove highly flammable plants and dense groupings to reduce foliage mass. This reduces the fuel volume and lowers the intensity of any fire that should approach a structure. Maintain some vegetation or you'll create a new problem because bare soil will easily wash away if there aren't plants to maintain its position.

High Fire hazard species

Adenostoma fasciculatum – Chamise
Adenostoma sparsifolium – Red Shanks
Artemisia californica – California Sagebrush

Eriogonum fasciculatum – Common buckwheat
Salvia species – Sage

Valuable Water Shed Species (these plants provide good slope and soil stabilization, and wildlife habitat)

Arctostaphylos species – Manzanita
Ceanothus species – Wild Lilac
Comarostaphylis diversifolia - Summer Holly
Garrya species – Silk Tassel
Heteromeles arbutifolia – Toyon

Juglans species – Walnut
Quercus species – Oak
Rhus species – Sumac
Rhamnus species – Buckthorn

Slow Burning Planting:

Look for low growing plant species. Choose a combination of native and introduced plants with limited foliage mass. These plants will be introduced as seeds or from containers and will require supplemental watering to start its growth. Most plants will burn when exposed to intense heat but the effectiveness of this planting is achieved by slowing fires with plants that have little to burn. A mixture of plant types is a good idea.

Low fuel volume native plants

Eriophyllum species – Yarrow
Eschscholzia californica – California Poppy
Lotus scoparius – Deerweed
Lupinus species – Annual lupines
Mimulus species – Monkey flower

Penstemon species – Penstemon
Salvia columbariae – Chia
Salvia sonomensis – Creeping Sage
Trichostema lanatum – Woolly Blue Curly
Zauschneria species – California species

Low fuel volume introduced plants

Artemisia caucasica – Silver
Artiplex glauca – Saltbrush
Artiplex semibaccata – Creeping Saltbush
Cistus crispus – Rockrose

Cistus salviifolius – Sageleaf Rockrose
Santolina chamaecyparissus – Lavender Cotton
Santolina virens – Green Santolina

Fire Retardant Planting

This category of planting is where you can find the most prevention. The low foliage level combined with high moisture content is key. Nothing should be over 18" high. The planting here is much more domestic in appearance and provides high soil stabilization and can be developed to mix into parts of the natural vegetation.

High Fire Retarding Plants

Carpobrotus species – Sea Fig
Delosperma 'Alba' – White Trailing Ice Plant

Lampranthus spectabilis – Trailing Ice Plant
Malephora crocea – Croceum Ice Plant

Drosanthemum floribundum – Rosea Ice Plant

Arctotheca calendula – Cape Weed
Baccharis pilularis – Prostrate Coyote Bush
Coprosma kirkii – Creeping Coprosma
Gazania rigens leucolaena – Trailing Gazania
Lippia canescens- Lippia

Moderate Fire Retarding Plants

Myoporum parvilolium - Myoporum
Osteospermum fruticosum – African Daisy
Santolina species – Lavender Cotton
Trifolium fragiferum var. O’Connor’s – O’Connor’s Legume
Vinca Species - Periwinkle

Domestic Planting

There are instances where homes located deep within a housing development and away from the perimeter housing edge have burned because their wood roofs or domestic plantings have caught fire from the burning embers that are blown during winds. This planting is located around homes and should be placed carefully and consist of species which do not readily catch fire. Limit the amount of tall trees around your home, thin foliage and remove dead branches from large plants next to your house.

Acceptable domestic plant species

Arbutus unedo – Strawberry Tree
Arcostaphylos species – Manzanita
Ceratonia siliqua – Carob Tree
Cercis occidentalis – Western Rosebud
Convolvulus cneorum – Blush Morning Glory
Feijoa sellowiana – Pineapple Guava
Metrosideros excelsus – New Zealand Christmas Tree
Myoporum species – Myoporum
Nerium oleander – Oleander

Pittosporum species – Pittosporum
Prunus species – Evergreen Cherry
Punica granatum – Pomegranate
Pyracantha species – Oak
Rhamnus alaternus – Italian Buckthorn
Ribes species – Currant, Gooseberry
Schinus terebinthifolius – Brazilian Pepper
Simmondsia chinensis – Jojoba
Tecomaria capensis – Cape Honeysuckle

Undesirable domestic plant species

Acacia species – Acacia
Cedrus species – Cedar
Cupressus species – Cypress
Dedonaea viscosa – Hopseed Bush

Eucalyptus species - Eucalyptus
Juniperus species - Juniper
Pennisetum – Fountain Grass
Pinus species - Pine

Miscellaneous Tips:

On hillsides, plant low growing ground covers and irrigate

Avoid dense vegetation next to houses

Avoid using wood roofs and projecting overhangs

Remember: All plants and landscaping must be maintained. Plants need water; they must be weeded, trimmed and fed.

Informative Websites

<http://www.firesafecouncil.org/education/landscaping/index.html>

<http://www.firesafecouncil.org/educationindex.html>

<http://www.firesafecouncil.org/education/insideout/firesafebig.html>

<http://www.firesafecouncil.org/education/questionnaire/index.html>

<http://www.ucfpl.ucop.edu/UW1%20Documents/014.PDF>