UC Marin Master Gardeners

Marin County FIRE-SMART LANDSCAPING

A well-maintained garden designed around defensible space can improve the odds that your home will survive a wildfire.

THE SCIENCE

UC Cooperative Extension provides homeowners with up-to-date science-based information for managing and maintaining landscapes for multiple objectives including fuels and fire management. There are no published fire-wise or fire-resistant plant lists that are science-based or peer-reviewed. Thus, designing and maintaining defensible space is more important than plant selection.

DESIGN DEFENSIBLE SPACE

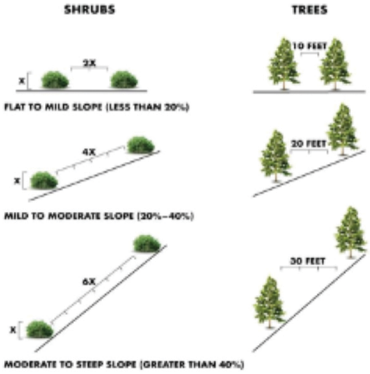
Create fuel breaks surrounding your house and within your garden. Create space vertically and horizontally via plant placement and pruning. Use hardscape and noncombustible materials around structures and to separate individual plants and groups of plants. Use the right plants in the right places with fire, climate, and water guidelines in mind.

MAINTAIN DEFENSIBLE SPACE

Keep your garden free from dry and dead wood, dry grasses, and leaf litter, especially near any structures. Prune plants to provide horizontal and vertical space around structures and throughout your garden. Eliminate fire ladders. Hydrate plants with a water-wise irrigation system. Mulch safely to conserve water.

ELIMINATE FUEL LADDERS

A grass fire can move up into shrubs and then into trees.



SPACE PLANTS AND TREES

Guidelines are for plant groupings.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
Agriculture and Natural Resources
UC Master Gardener Program

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Marin County FIRE-SMART LANDSCAPING CHECKUP

DESIGN A FIRE-SMART LANDSCAPE

- Choose well-behaved, pollinator-friendly, summer-dry winter-wet plants appropriate for your microclimate such as native or Mediterranean plants and keep biodiversity in mind.
- Create plant islands that have similar sun, nutrient, and water needs.
- Remember: The closer the house, the shorter the plant.
- Incorporate hardscape and noncombustible mulch such as stepping stones, rocks, and gravel around your house and throughout your garden to separate plant islands.
- Space plants for easy maintenance.
- Interrupt straight lines of plants, hedges, and trees to create fuel breaks.
- Don't plant a fuel ladder.
- Install an irrigation system to keep plants well hydrated without over-watering.
- Plan to apply compost and organic fertilizer to keep soil and plants healthy.

RESOURCES

UC Marin Master Gardeners:
Public web site: http://marinmg.ucanr.edu
Fire-smart landscaping:
http://marinmg.ucanr.edu/Fire-smart_Landscaping/
Help Desk: HelpDesk@marinmg.org (415) 473-4204

UCCE:
Fire in California: https://ucanr.edu/sites/fire/
Fire in California Wildfire Preparation:
https://ucanr.edu/sites/fire/Prepare/

FireSafe Marin: https://firesafemaring.org

MAINTENANCE

Prune

- Prune dormant shrubs and trees.
- Prune branches to be 10 feet from roof and chimney.
- Prune low tree limbs if needed to create vertical space.
- Separate canopies.
- Prune shrubs to create horizontal and vertical spacing.
- Clean out dried, dead, diseased wood in trees and shrubs any time.
- Break up hedges and uninterrupted plantings.

Mulch

- Use mulch to hold soil moisture and eliminate weeds.
- Use noncombustible mulch such as rocks, stone, and gravel around structures and between plant islands. (Most wood mulch is combustible.
- Between five and 30 feet from structures use composited wood chips to a depth of two inches. Beyond 30 feet, three inches is okay.
- Do not use fine, stringy mulches.

Clean Up

- Eliminate combustible materials near structures.
- Move woodpiles away from structures.
- Remove woody vegetation near and on structures.
- Remove dry grass and diseased, dry trees and shrubs.
- Clear away clumps of fallen leaves and pine needles.
- Eliminate roof and gutter litter and clean under deck.