

January 15, 2020



Now Is the Time to Take Action

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I know that we all breathed a sigh of relief when the rain and snow finally came and we celebrated the fact we had made it through another season without wildland fire. My husband, who is retired from CAL FIRE, and I have taught a Fire Wise Landscape class for Master Gardeners for 18 years. But between the recent disastrous fires in California and the growing homeowners' insurance challenge, our presentations are more in demand than ever, including the one we will do as part of the Master Gardener Public Education series on February 1, 2020 from 9-12 in the Bethell-Delfino Agriculture Building at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville.. We are also available to give presentations to Fire Safe Councils, homeowners' organizations and neighborhood groups. You can leave a message for us at the Master Gardener Office at 530-621-5512 and we will return your call.

In our presentations, we discuss positive actions to take on your property and in your landscape to improve your safety. We also discuss important house construction considerations. As we learned from the Paradise fire, houses constructed under more recent building codes were more likely to withstand a fire. Non-flammable decking and other non-combustible surfaces around your home, enclosed eaves (so that embers can't get into your house as easily) and routinely cleaned gutters are also important factors in increasing the safety of your home and property. For a thorough explanation of this, go to <https://www.firesafemarin.org/home-hardening/soffits-eaves>.

Earlier last year, the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors passed a vegetation management and defensible space ordinance similar to CAL FIRE's defensible space laws. The link to the FAQs about this ordinance can be found at <https://www.edcgov.us/Government/CAO/vegetation-management-faq>. The County will begin enforcing this law June 1, 2020.

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To comply with these regulations, our advice falls into three general categories: Remove, Reduce and Replace.

- REMOVE through elimination of dead and dying material or other hazardous fuel sources.
- REDUCE and space out remaining plantings to eliminate the continuous line of vegetation (both horizontally and vertically) that can serve as ladder fuels. Ladder fuels can be dry grass, shrubs, low-hanging branches or small trees which grow so close together that they allow fire to easily move up into the tops of trees, causing it to spread more quickly.
- REPLACE by replanting selected areas or even the majority of your property. In either case, there are more exciting new and sustainable plant options today than ever.

The state regulations establish two zones, one that includes the first 30 feet around the house and a 31-100-foot zone. However, recently, some experts are advocating having nothing flammable within the first 5 feet of your house.

Susan Kocher, UCCE Natural Resources Advisor in the Central Sierra, said home fire safety “usually means taking away vegetation, rather than adding it. A more safe landscape would be more sparse.” An important consideration if you are replanting is the size of the mature plant, so that, instead of overplanting and having to remove plants repeatedly over the years, you space properly from the beginning.

Whether you attend our three-hour class or one of our one-hour presentations we will be scheduling around the Western Slope, we believe you will come away with a better understanding of how action you take today can improve the likelihood that your home will survive a wildfire. As we saw in Paradise, there is very little protection in a firestorm of that magnitude. But in the big picture, every action you take today may keep you and your property safer in the future.

If you can't make it to one of our presentations, check out our PowerPoint, which can be found on our website at https://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/files/212885.pdf.

For more information on the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County, see our website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512, or send us an email using the Ask a Master Gardener option on our website. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. We also encourage you to visit us at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, located at 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville, behind Folsom Lake College, El Dorado Center. See http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Demonstration_Garden for more information and days and hours of operation, or call us to schedule a tour. To sign up for notices and newsletters, see http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news. Master Gardeners are also on Facebook and Instagram; we hope you enjoy our postings and will share them with your friends.