



Gardening in Wildfire Lands

By Mary Tran

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County

Let's start with stuff we all know. We love the place where we live, especially the woodlands and forests. We know that wildfires are going to happen. We are caretakers for our own small gardens as well as the big garden -- the earth -- we all share.

How do we garden in wildfire lands?

Before fire season, it is crucial to maintain the 100' defensible space around the house. (See CalFire recommendations: <https://www.readyforwildfire.org/prepare-for-wildfire/>.) When choosing plants, go for the ones that are known to be fire-resistant. Often these are native plants. In the spring, clear the fallen branches and mow. Oh yes, then mow again! This is a good time to observe what is growing around you. Get familiar with both the native plants and the invasives that are seeding the area. The natives are good candidates for post-fire recovery.

After a wildfire, there are three main steps for recovery of the land and plants.

First, wait and watch. Unless there is immediate danger of landslides or loss of topsoil, leave the soil and vegetation alone during the first rainy season. Observe what resprouts. Observe how the oaks and other trees are recovering. Many native plants are fire-resistant and fire-adapted and might just get on with life in the spring. Avoid driving or walking on the burned soil. If there is risk of erosion, landslides, and excess drainage into the creek or a ditch, you will need to set out barriers, such as wattles, fallen logs, wood chips, or straw mulching.

Second, support recovery of the soil and plants. The oaks may need up to three years to completely recover. That means you don't need to remove them unless there is danger of them falling. If you can leave them in place, their root systems will help stabilize the soil. Your oak is probably okay if the bark is not damaged, the tree is not hollowed out, and the tips of the stems

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are able to sprout in the spring. As you probably already discovered, oaks will very readily put out shoots from their stumps.

At this early stage, look out for the arrival of aggressive new types of grasses and bushes. Some invasives may actually benefit from removal of the native plants and the increased sunlight in your fire-disturbed area. It is important to block their growth by pulling them out by hand, including the root, plus not re-seeding with non-native grasses.

Third, replant with smarts. Restore your 100' defensible space and replant with fire-resistant and drought-resistant plants. Top choices include: Oaks (coast live oak, valley oak, or interior live oak) not pines, cedars, or spruce (sorry!); ceanothus; succulents such as agave and stonecrop; and toyon. Avoid: chamise, broom, pampas grass, tree of heaven, and bougainvillea. (See: <http://www.forevergreenforestry.com/documents/AppJ-FireResistantPlantsPUB.pdf> .)

For help selecting new plants, see the information provided by:

El Dorado Resource Conservation District:

(http://edgdrd.wpengine.com/wpcontent/uploads/2019/05/HSRCD_Vegetation_Guidelines_2005-1.pdf)

University of California Agricultural and Natural Resources

(http://ucanr.edu/sites/oak_range/Californias_Rangeland_Oak_Species/)

California Native Plant Society's *Manual of California Vegetation* (<https://www.cnps.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/CNPS-fire-recovery-guide-LR-040618.pdf>)

Join Master Gardeners on Saturday, September 21 (El Dorado Hills Library) or 28 (Sherwood Demonstration Garden), from 9:00 a.m. to noon for a free Public Education class on Native Plants.

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](tel:5306215512), 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.