

Know Which Fire-Resistant Plants Are Best For Your Garden

Leimone Waite, Master Gardener, April 12, 2019

Q: After the Carr Fire we received questions about what to plant for erosion control, privacy or just restoring the landscape.

Last fall, Master Gardeners shared a list of plants that should be avoided because they're highly flammable, but for people not familiar with garden plants this list was not that helpful. This was apparent when, at a recent talk, a frustrated audience member asked, "So what do I plant?"

A: Here's a list of what to replant for a more fire-resistant landscape. Many factors went into determining which plants should be recommended for our Redding area. First, we looked at published lists of fire resistant plants and then choose the best plants by using criteria such as how much moisture they retain in the leaf; how well they survive in our hot climate with colder winters and if they're moderate- to low-water users. If the plant contains a lot of aromatic oils or tends to drop an abundance of litter it's more flammable and therefore didn't make this list.

We use the zone concept that is used by Cal Fire to describe where plants should be planted in the landscape. With this method, Zone 1 is the first 30 feet surrounding the structure and Zones 2 and 3 move progressively further away. This isn't a comprehensive list, just some suggestions of common plants that are more fire resistant.

When planting, you should follow recommended landscape design for reducing fire danger around your home such as using plant islands and keeping everything low and green for the first few feet around the home. Also keep in mind the plants on this list are fire resistant, but all plants will burn if conditions are bad enough.

Note that spp is "botanist speak" for multiple species within a genus.

Zone 1 plants

Ground Covers:

- Lawn grass — various species
- Ajuga reptans, Carpet Bugle
- Festuca spp., Fescue
- Sedum spp., Stonecrop
- Gazania reigns, Gazania
- Viola spp., Violet

Perennials:

- Agapanthus spp., Lily-of-the-Nile
- Agave spp., Agave
- Aquilegia Formosa, Western Columbine

- *Bergenia* spp., Bergenia
- *Canna indica*, Canna lily
- *Centaurea cineraria*, Dusty Miller
- *Cerastium tomentosum*, Snow-in-Summer
- *Dicentra Formosa*, Western Bleeding Heart
- *Hemerocallis* hybrids, Daylily
- *Heuchera micrantha*, Coral Bells
- *Iris douglasiana*, Douglas Iris
- *Liriope gigantea*, Giant Turf Lily
- *Penstemon* spp., Beard Tongue
- *Pelargonium* spp., Geranium
- *Stachys byzantine*, Lamb's Ears
- *Tulbaghia violacea*, Society Garlic

Shrubs:

- *Berberis (Mahonia) aquifolium* var. *repens*, Creeping Mahonia
- *Camellia* spp, Camelia
- *Escallonia* spp., Escallonia
- *Gardenia jasminoides*, Gardenia
- *Vaccinium corymbosum*, Blueberry

Trees:

- *Acer* spp., Maple
- *Cercis occidentalis*, Western Redbud
- *Fagus* spp., Beech
- *Feijoa sellowiana*, Pineapple Guava
Fraxinus spp., Ash
- *Lagerstroemia indica*, Crape Myrtle
- *Malus* spp., Apple
- *Cornus* spp., Dogwood

Zone 2 plants:

Ground Covers:

- *Achillea millefolium*, Yarrow

- *Achillea tomentosa*, Woolly Yarrow
- *Fragaria chiloensis*, Beach Strawberry
- *Fragaria vesca*, Wood Strawberry

Perennials:

- *Coreopsis* spp., Coreopsis
- *Dietes bicolor*, African Iris
- *Dietes vegeta* Fortnight Lily
- *Erysimum linifolium*, Wallflower
- *Hesperaloe parviflora*, Red Yucca
- *Heuchera maxima*, Island Alum Root
- *Iris macrosiphon*, Ground Iris
- *Iris* spp., Iris
- *Kniphofia uvaria*, Red Hot Poker
- *Sisyrinchium bellum*, Blue-eyed Grass
- *Verbena peruviana*, Perennial Verbena
- *Zauschneria californica*, California Fuchsia

Shrubs:

- *Cistus* spp. , Rock Rose
- *Lavatera assurgentiflora*, Tree Mallow
- *Punica granatum*, Pomegranate
- *Rhapiolepis* spp., India Hawthorn
- *Rhus integrifolia*, Lemonade Berry
- *Romneya coulteri*, Matilija Poppy
- *Rosa banksiae*, Lady Banks' Rose (vine)
- *Symphoricarpos mollis*, Creeping Snowberry (vine)
- *Trachelospermum jasminoides*, Star Jasmine

Trees:

- *Arbutus unedo*, Strawberry Tree
- *Citrus* species, Citrus
- *Pistacia chinensis*, Chinese Pistache

- Quercus spp., Black or Blue Oaks

Anything planted in zone 1 and 2 can also be planted in zone 3. In zone 3, you don't have to be as careful of plant selection but should be looking to remove any vegetation that is highly flammable. These are plants from our plants to avoid list such as pines, eucalyptus and juniper. You should also be thinning to reduce vegetation (fuel) from the landscape. Maintenance such as mowing, cleaning up plant debris and thinning in all zones is very important to keeping the landscape fire resistant.

The Shasta Master Gardeners Program can be reached by phone at 242-2219 or email mastergardener@shastacollege.edu. The gardener office is staffed by volunteers trained by the University of California to answer gardeners' questions using information based on scientific research.