

Preparing Home Landscaping for Fire

Most Colusa County residents do not live in a fire zone but you may have a friend who does or you may have a cabin in the forest. Please pass this information to a friend.

Wildfire will always be a part of the California landscape, but it is possible to design and maintain homes and property in ways that reduce vulnerability to wildfire. A key component of this protection is the proper placement and maintenance of plants around the home. While many are seeking plants that have a label that assures some level of fire resistance, it is important to recognize that any plant will burn under the right conditions and thus regular plant maintenance is critical.

To be able to reduce ember, radiant heat, and direct flame contact exposure to a home, develop and implement a three-zone strategy whereby the highest priorities and most restrictive measures are incorporated in the area closest to the home or other building of interest.

Incorporating these strategies does require some adjustment from the ways of the past, but with some small changes to the approach, it is possible to have both a beautiful landscape and a home that is more resilient to wildfire. Work from the house outward to make sure the structure itself is hardened against fire, then implement the guidelines here in concentric circles moving away from your structures.

To create a fire-resistant landscape:

Design and implement 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 irrigation needs in mind.

- Create plant islands that have similar sun, nutrient, and water needs.

- Replace combustible gates that attach to the house with materials that will not burn.

Maintain your landscape

- 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 throughout your garden and surrounding structures.

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

- Hydrate plants with a water-wise irrigation system. Use non-combustible mulches near to the house.

Defensible Space is only part of a larger landscape management strategy, designed to protect your home and property. The general surroundings leading up to your home must be considered as part of your wildfire preparedness planning.

For more information, go to ucanr.edu/sites/fire