A Fire Safe Landscape Depends on Proper Placement and Maintenance of Plants

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SOUTH PLACER FIRE DIST

Minimize fire pathways to your house and other structures by maintaining horizontal and vertical space between plants, trees and flammable materials.

Access much more information on the Placer / Nevada Counties Fire-Smart Landscaping Website by scanning this code.

Any plant can burn given the right conditions, but by correct placement, and irrigating and maintaining them properly you can have a landscape that is both beautiful and fire safe. By choosing plants native to California, this demonstration garden also provides habitat for local insects and birds.

Reduce the potential for embers to ignite materials next to structures

- **Zone 0**, the 5' perimeter surrounding your home, should be completely free of anything that can catch fire, including plants.
- Keep roofs and gutters clean of debris

Minimize fire pathways to the house

- **Zone 1**, 5-30' from your home, should be "lean and clean".
- Remove combustible materials such as twigs, needles and leaves, dry grasses, shrubs, woodpiles, building materials, cardboard boxes, and solvents.
- Create separation between vegetation groups by planting in "islands" surrounded by bare mineral soil, stone or paved walkways.
- Keep tree canopies 10' from your house and other trees.
- Remove and thin out lower branches of trees and shrubs to break fire's vertical path (or "fuel ladder")

The brown areas in this site plan show non-combustible gravel areas and walkways around the perimeter of the building and between planting islands, serving as firebreaks.

Manzanita before (left) and after (right) regular pruning to reduce the accumulation of dead wood and create vertical spacing, resulting in a plant less susceptible to wildfire (Valachovic et al. 2021).

Maintain your landscape by keeping it properly irrigated, pruning to open up plant structure, and removing dead plant material.

Be aware of, and remove, hidden combustible material in your landscape. Dead or dry leaves and twigs can accumulate under ground covers or inside shrubs that have been hedged or improperly pruned. An ember falling on this hidden fuel can easily cause fire.

Avoid hedging shrubs, which causes a build-up of dead and dry twigs inside that can catch embers and ignite. A better alternative is to prune shrubs into a more natural shape when they are young by selecting a few main stems.

Mulch Matters

Scan for mulch factsheet

Properly placed organic mulch is important for plant and soil health. It retains moisture and inhibits weeds, reducing fire risk, but the mulch itself is flammable. What's a gardener to do?

- **Use inorganic materials in the 0-5' zone surrounding structures.** Paving stones, gravel or decomposed granite are perfect because they are not flammable.
- **Mulch planted areas in the 5-30' lean and clean zone with partially composted arborist wood chips under 3" in size.**
- **Mulch should be no more than 3" deep.**
- **Irrigate mulched areas to keep them moist.**
- **Avoid highly flammable materials** such as shredded rubber, pine needles and shredded cedar bark.