



Fire Safe Landscaping—Steps You Can Take to Protect Your Home

The importance of fire-proofing a landscape shouldn't go overlooked. It can help save a home in the event of a fire.



WILD FIRES RIPPED THROUGH NORTHERN CALIFORNIA destroying some 8,400 homes and other buildings, killing dozens and forcing thousands to flee their homes, according to state officials. That was a disaster of epic proportion which no one ever would want to experience.

Fire officials stress that homeowners must do their part to protect themselves and their property with fire safe landscaping to make their homes as defensible as possible.

Living in the brush-covered mountain areas poses two major threats to life and property. The first is the potential devastation from fire. The other is the mudflows and soil erosion that occurs when heavy rain falls on a fire-ravaged hillside. To provide relative safety requires certain modifications to the environment and recognition of the need to provide ample protection for yourself and your neighbors.

The fire department recommends a "Green Belt", a landscaped and irrigated zone designed to provide an adequate firebreak between your home and the surrounding native vegetation. Green Belt plants should be low growing, deep-rooted, drought resistant with low fuel volume. The most fire resistive are succulents (Iceplants, Aloe or Sedum). The next best would be herbaceous or non-woody plants (Periwinkle, Gazania, African Daisy and Ajuga, etc.). The third best are low-growing shrubs with thick leathery leaves (Dwarf Coyote Bush, English and Algerian Ivy, Rockrose, etc.). These shrubs are easily maintained at a height of 18 to 24 inches.

Check with your local nursery for information about what plants grow best in your particular area and what can be mixed with the native shrubs, since they have different water requirements.

Regardless of what plants you choose here are some basics about reducing the fire hazard:

- ▲ Keep the landscape clean. Remove litter under trees and shrubs; prune out dead wood. Remove dead and dried-out portions of ground covers and succulents.
- ▲ Plant lawns, succulent ground covers or other low-growing plants around all structures, and water regularly.
- ▲ Keep tree canopies cut back at least ten feet from roofs and trim brush away from the building.

After a fire the main concern is erosion. The use of jute matting or straw mulch and the seeding of quickly growing grasses or ground covers for temporary protection can prevent this. Grasses for temporary protection are *Bromus mollis* (soft chess), *Hordeum Vulgare* (barley) and *Lolium Multiflorum* (annual ryegrass).

Regard these hazards as part of the nature of the foothills. The cost must be viewed as part of the price and privilege of mountain living.

Whether you own a home or are buying a home in a high fire risk area, it will be your responsibility to verify proper fire-safe landscaping. It is not part of a standard real estate inspection. However, all the information you need is available free from your local fire department or on their website at www.lafd.org. Also, upon request, someone from your local fire department will come out to help you understand how this applies to you and your property.



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