

4.9 Fire Safety

Individuals can make an enormous contribution to fire hazard reduction and need to be educated about their important role. Homeowners are generally especially easy to enlist.

4.9.1 Homeowners Checklist to Reduce Fire Risk

Design and install a firewise landscape. Be sure to consider:

- Local area fire history;
- Site location and overall terrain;
- Prevailing winds and seasonal weather;
- Property contours and boundaries;
- Native vegetation;
- Plant characteristics and placement (water and salt retention ability, aromatic oils, fuel load per area, and size);
- Irrigation requirements.

The primary goal of a fire-resistant landscape is fuel reduction. It helps to assign zones:

- **Zone 1:** This well-irrigated area encircles the structure for at least 30' on all sides, providing space for fire suppression equipment in the event of an emergency. Plantings should be limited to carefully spaced fire resistant species.
- **Zone 2:** Fire-resistant plant materials should be used here. Plants should be low-growing, and the irrigation system should extend into this section.
- **Zone 3:** Place low-growing plants and well-spaced trees in this area, remembering to keep the volume of vegetation (fuel) low.
- **Zone 4:** Furthest from the structure is a natural area. Thin vegetation selectively here, and remove highly flammable vegetation.

Always remember to:

- Leave a minimum of 30' around the house to accommodate fire equipment, if necessary.
- Carefully space the trees you plant.
- Take out the "ladder fuels" — vegetation that serves as a link between grass and tree tops. It can carry fire to a structure or from a structure to vegetation.
- Give yourself added protection with "fuel breaks" like driveways, gravel walkways, and lawns.

When maintaining a landscape:

- Keep trees and shrubs pruned. Prune all trees 6' to 10' from the ground.
- Remove leaf clutter, and dead and overhanging branches.
- Mow your lawn regularly.
- Dispose of cuttings and debris promptly, according to local regulations.
- Store firewood away from the house.
- Be sure the irrigation system is well maintained.
- Use care when refueling garden equipment and maintain it regularly.