LIVING WITH FIRE IN SONOMA COUNTY

A GUIDE FOR THE HOMEOWNER
LIVING IN A HIGH HAZARD FIRE ENVIRONMENT

Much of Sonoma County is considered a high hazard fire environment. Based on past experience, this area possesses all the ingredients necessary to support large, intense, and uncontrollable wildfires.

Within this hazardous environment, there are individual houses, subdivisions, and entire communities. Many homes, however, would be unable to survive an intense wildfire. Since it is not a question of “if” wildfires will occur but “when” they will occur, the likelihood of human life and property loss is great and growing.

Our ability to live more safely in this fire environment greatly depends upon our use of “pre-fire activities.” Pre-fire activities are actions taken before a wildfire occurs which improve the survivability of people and homes. They include proper vegetation management around the home (known as defensible space), use of fire resistant building materials, appropriate subdivision design, and other measures. Research clearly demonstrates that pre-fire activities save lives and property.

In 1999, Fire Safe Sonoma adopted The Living With Fire program for Sonoma County. Fire Safe Sonoma is a non-profit 501(c)3 corporation comprised of fire prevention professionals, public agency representatives, business owners and concerned residents who recognize the urgent need to deal with the issue of catastrophic wildfire in Sonoma County. Our mission is to raise public awareness of wildfire related problems, such as loss of life and property, and devastation of wildlife habitat and the natural environment as well as provide education that promotes fire safety and prevention. For more information about Fire Safe Sonoma call (707) 565-1152.

THE “WHY WE’RE WORRIED ABOUT WILDFIRE” EQUATION

Fire is a natural part of our environment. Our forests and rangelands were burning long before there was a Santa Rosa, Petaluma, Sonoma or Glen Ellen. + Many homes are built and maintained in this fire environment without regard to wildfire. + With more people using our wildlands, there is a greater chance of fire starts. + Today’s wildfires can burn intensely and be difficult to control. = Potential for:
- Greater loss of life
- Increased property losses
- More damage to natural resources
- More money needed for firefighting.
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT DEFENSIBLE SPACE

WHAT IS DEFENSIBLE SPACE?
Defensible space is the area between a house and an oncoming wildfire where the vegetation has been modified to reduce the wildfire threat and to provide an opportunity for firefighters to effectively defend the house. Sometimes, a defensible space is simply a homeowner’s properly maintained backyard.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VEGETATION AND WILDFIRE THREAT?
Many people do not view the plants growing on their property as a threat. But in terms of wildfire, the vegetation adjacent to their homes can have considerable influence upon the survivability of their houses. All vegetation, including plants native to the area as well as ornamental plants, is potential wildfire fuel. If vegetation is properly modified and maintained, a wildfire can be slowed, the length of flames shortened, and the amount of heat reduced, all of which assist firefighters in defending the home against an oncoming wildfire.

HOW DO I CHANGE THE VEGETATION ON MY PROPERTY TO REDUCE THE WILDFIRE THREAT?
The objective of defensible space is to reduce the wildfire threat to a home by changing the characteristics of the adjacent vegetation. Defensible space practices include:

- Increasing the moisture content of vegetation.
- Decreasing the amount of flammable vegetation.
- Shortening plant height.
- Altering the arrangement of plants.

This is accomplished through the “Three R’s of Defensible Space.” The article “Creating An Effective Defensible Space” provides detailed information about changing vegetation characteristics for defensible space.

THE THREE R’s OF DEFENSIBLE SPACE

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THE FIRE DEPARTMENT IS SUPPOSED TO PROTECT MY HOUSE, SO WHY BOTHER WITH DEFENSIBLE SPACE?
Some individuals incorrectly assume that a fire engine will be parked in their driveway and firefighters will be actively defending their homes if a wildfire approaches. During a major wildfire, it is unlikely there will be enough firefighting resources available to defend every home. In these instances, firefighters will likely select homes they can most safely and effectively protect. Even with adequate resources, some wildfires may be so intense that there may be little firefighters can do to prevent a house from burning. The key is to reduce fire intensity as wildfire nears the house. This can be accomplished by reducing the amount of flammable vegetation surrounding the home. Consequently, the most important person in protecting a house from wildfire is not a firefighter, but the property owner. And it’s the action taken by the owner before the wildfire occurs (such as proper landscaping) that is most critical.

DOES DEFENSIBLE SPACE REQUIRE A LOT OF BARE GROUND IN MY LANDSCAPE?
No. Unfortunately, many people have this misconception. While bare ground is certainly effective in reducing the wildfire threat, it is unnecessary and unacceptable due to appearance, soil erosion, and other reasons. Many homes have attractive, well vegetated landscapes that also serve as effective defensible space.

DOES CREATING A DEFENSIBLE SPACE REQUIRE ANY SPECIAL SKILLS OR EQUIPMENT?
No. For the most part, creating a defensible space employs routine gardening and landscape maintenance practices such as pruning, mowing, weeding, plant removal, appropriate plant selection, and irrigation. Equipment needed includes common tools like a chain saw, pruning saw, pruning shears, loppers, weed-eater, shovel, and a rake. A chipper, compost bin, or a large rented trash dumpster may be useful in disposing of unwanted plant material.

DOES A Defensible SPACE MAKE A DIFFERENCE?
Yes. Investigations of homes threatened by wildfire indicate that houses with an effective defensible space are much more likely to survive a wildfire. Furthermore, homes with both an effective defensible space and a nonflammable roof (composition shingles, tile, metal, etc.) are many times more likely to survive a wildfire than those without defensible space and flammable roofs (wood shakes or shingles). Appropriate roofing materials and defensive space give firefighters the opportunity to effectively and safely defend the home.

DOES HAVING A DEFENSIBLE SPACE GUARANTEE MY HOUSE WILL SURVIVE A WILDFIRE?
No. Under extreme conditions, almost any house can burn. But having a defensible space will significantly improve the odds of your home surviving a wildfire.

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WHY DOESN’T EVERYONE LIVING IN A HIGH WILDFIRE HAZARD AREA CREATE A DEFENSIBLE SPACE?
The specific reasons for not creating a defensible space are varied. Some individuals believe “it won’t happen to me.” Others think the costs (time, money, effort, loss of privacy, etc.) outweigh the benefits. Some fail to implement defensible space practices simply because of misconceptions or lack of knowledge.
CREATING AN EFFECTIVE DEFENSIBLE SPACE*

...A Step-by-Step Guide

Are you worried about the wildfire threat to your home, but aren’t sure how to get started in making your home defensible? Follow these six steps to an effective defensible space...

**STEP ONE: HOW BIG IS AN EFFECTIVE DEFENSIBLE SPACE?**

The size of the defensible space area is usually expressed as a distance extending outward from the sides of the house. This distance varies by the type of wildland vegetation growing near the house and the steepness of the terrain.

On the “Recommended Defensible Space Distance” chart presented below, find the vegetation type and percent slope which best describes the area where your house is located. Then find the recommended defensible space distance for your situation.

For example, if your property is surrounded by wildland grasses, and is located on flat land, your recommended defensible space distance would extend 30 feet from the sides of the house. If your house is on a 25% slope and the adjacent wildland vegetation is dense tall brush, your recommended defensible space distance would be 150 feet or more.

If the recommended distance goes beyond your property boundaries, contact the adjacent property owner and work cooperatively on creating a defensible space. The effectiveness of defensible space increases when multiple property owners work together. The local assessor’s office can provide assistance if the owners of adjacent properties are unknown. Do **not** work on someone else’s property without their permission.

* Please note the recommendations presented in this article are suggestions made by local firefighters experienced in protecting homes from wildfire. They do not take precedence over local ordinances. CHECK WITH YOUR LOCAL FIRE OR PLANNING DEPARTMENT FOR SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS.

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**DEFENSIBLE SPACE**

**RECOMMENDED DISTANCES—STEEPNESS OF SLOPE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VEGETATION TYPE</th>
<th>FLAT TO GENTLY SLOPING (0 TO 20%)</th>
<th>MODERATELY STEEP (21% TO 40%)</th>
<th>VERY STEEP (+40%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grass</td>
<td>30-50 feet</td>
<td>100 feet</td>
<td>100 feet +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shrubs</td>
<td>100 feet</td>
<td>150 feet</td>
<td>150 feet +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trees</td>
<td>30 feet</td>
<td>100 feet</td>
<td>150 feet +</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1) Find the percent slope which best describes your property.
2) Find the type of vegetation which best describes the wildland plants growing on or near your property.
3) Locate the number in feet corresponding to your slope and vegetation. This is your recommended defensible space distance.
Temporarily mark the recommended distance with flagging or strips of cloth tied to shrubs, trees, or stakes around your home. This will be your defensible space area.

**STEP TWO: IS THERE ANY DEAD VEGETATION WITHIN THE RECOMMENDED DEFENSIBLE SPACE AREA?**

Dead vegetation includes dead trees and shrubs, dead branches lying on the ground or still attached to living plants, dried grass, flowers and weeds, dropped leaves and needles, and firewood stacks. In most instances, dead vegetation should be removed from the recommended defensible space area. A description of the types of dead vegetation you’re likely to encounter and the recommended actions are presented below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPES OF DEAD VEGETATION AND RECOMMENDED PRACTICE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DEAD FUEL TYPE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RECOMMENDED PRACTICE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STANDING DEAD TREE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOWNED DEAD TREE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEAD SHRUBS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRIED GRASSES AND WILDFLOWERS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEAD NEEDLES, LEAVES, BRANCHES, CONES (ON THE GROUND)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEAD NEEDLES, LEAVES, BRANCHES, AND TWIGS (OTHER THAN ON THE GROUND)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIREWOOD AND OTHER COMBUSTIBLE DEBRIS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**STEP THREE: IS THERE A CONTINUOUS DENSE COVER OF SHRUBS OR TREES PRESENT WITHIN THE RECOMMENDED DEFENSIBLE SPACE AREA?**

Sometimes wildland plants can occur as an uninterrupted layer of vegetation as opposed to being patchy or widely spaced individual plants. The more continuous and dense the vegetation, the greater the wildfire threat. If this situation is present within your defensible space area, you should “break-it-up” by providing a separation between plants or small groups of plants.

Not only are steep slopes often considered high wildfire areas, they are also highly erodible. When removing shrubs and trees from steep slopes, keep soil disturbance to a minimum. Also, it may be necessary to replace flammable vegetation with other plant materials to prevent excessive soil erosion.

**Recommended Separation Distances for Shrubs**

For areas with dense brush, the recommended separation distance is dependant upon shrub height and steepness of slope. Specific recommendations are presented below.

Note: Separation distances are measured between canopies (outermost branches) and not between trunks.

For example, if your home is located on a 10% slope and the brush is four feet tall, the separation distance would be two times the shrub height or eight feet. The recommended separation distance can be accomplished by removing plants or through pruning that reduces the diameter or height of shrubs (shorter height means less separation is needed).
**Recommended Separation Distances Between Tree Canopies**

For forested areas, the recommended amount of separation between tree canopies is determined by steepness of slope. The specific recommendations are presented here. Separation distances are measured between canopies (outer most branches) and not between trunks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Slope Type</th>
<th>Recommended Separation Distance</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flat to Gently Sloping (0-20%)</td>
<td>10 feet</td>
</tr>
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<td>Moderately Steep (21-40%)</td>
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<td>Very Steep (+41%)</td>
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</table>

Note: Separation distances are measured between canopies (outer most branches) and not between trunks. For example, if your house is situated on a 30% slope, the separation of tree canopies within your defensible space should be 20 feet. Creating separation between tree canopies can be accomplished through tree removal.

**STEP FOUR: ARE THERE LADDER FUELS PRESENT WITHIN THE RECOMMENDED DEFENSIBLE SPACE AREA?**

Vegetation is often present at varying heights, similar to the rungs of a ladder. Under these conditions, flames from fuels burning at ground level, such as a thick layer of pine needles, can be carried to shrubs which can ignite still higher fuels like tree branches. Vegetation that allows a fire to move from lower growing plants to taller ones is referred to as “ladder fuel.” The ladder fuel problem can be corrected by providing a separation between the vegetation layers.

Within the defensible space area, a vertical separation of three times the height of the lower fuel layer is recommended.

For example, if a shrub growing adjacent to a large pine tree is three feet tall, the recommended separation distance would be nine feet. This could be accomplished by removing the lower tree branches, reducing the height of the shrub, or both. The shrub could also be removed.
THE LEAN, CLEAN, AND GREEN CHECKLIST

1. Emphasize the use of low growing herbaceous (non-woody) plants that are kept green during the fire season through irrigation if necessary. Herbaceous plants include lawn, clover, a variety of groundcovers, bedding plants, bulbs, perennial flowers, and conservation grasses.

2. Emphasize use of mulches, rock, and non-combustible hard surfaces (concrete sidewalks, brick patios, and asphalt driveways).

3. Deciduous ornamental trees and shrubs are acceptable if they are kept green and free of dead plant material, ladder fuels are removed, and individual plants or groups of plants are arranged so that adjacent wildland vegetation cannot convey a fire through them to the structure. Shorter deciduous shrubs are preferred.

4. Minimize the use of ornamental coniferous shrubs and trees such as juniper, monterey pine and tall exotic grasses such as pampas grass.

5. Where permitted, most wildland shrubs and trees should be removed from this zone and replaced with more desirable alternatives (see first box). Individual specimens or small groups of wildland shrubs and trees can be retained so long as they are kept healthy and free of dead wood, are pruned to reduce the amount of fuel and height, and ladder fuels are removed.

6. For some areas substantial removal of wildland vegetation may not be allowed. In these instances, wildland vegetation should conform to the recommendations presented in steps 2 through 4. Please become familiar with local requirements before removal of wildland vegetation.

7. Tree limbs within 10 feet of a chimney, encroaching on powerlines, or touching the house should be removed.

STEP FIVE: IS THERE AN AREA AT LEAST 30 FEET WIDE SURROUNDING YOUR HOUSE THAT IS “LEAN, CLEAN, AND GREEN”?
The area immediately adjacent to your house is particularly important in terms of an effective defensible space. It is also the area that is usually landscaped. Within an area extending at least 30 feet from the house, the vegetation should be kept....

- **LEAN**—small amounts of flammable vegetation,
- **CLEAN**—no accumulation of dead vegetation or other flammable debris, and
- **GREEN**—plants are healthy and green during the fire season.

The “Lean, Clean, and Green Zone Checklist” will help you evaluate the area immediately adjacent to your house.

**STEP SIX: IS THE VEGETATION WITHIN THE RECOMMENDED DEFENSIBLE SPACE AREA MAINTAINED ON A REGULAR BASIS?**
Keeping your defensible space effective is a continual process. At least annually, review these defensible space steps and take action accordingly. An effective defensible space can be quickly diminished through neglect.

Steps Four, Five, and Six

Step Four: Remove Ladder Fuels

Step Five: Lean, Clean, and Green

Remove branches within 10 feet of chimney.

Step Six: Maintain Defensible Space
**HOME IGNITION ZONE**  
(The home plus 10ft distance)

It’s the “little things” that will endanger your home. Just a little ember landing on a little pile of flammable material will burn it. Spend a morning searching out and getting rid of those flammable little things outside and your home will be much safer.

1. Keep your rain gutters and roof clean of all flammable material.

2. Get rid of dry grass, brush and other flammable materials around your home - and don’t forget leaves, pine needles and bark walkways. Replace with well maintained (watered) landscape vegetation, green lawn and landscape rocks.

3. Clear all flammable materials from your deck. This includes brooms, stacked wood and easily ignitable patio furniture. Also enclose or board up the area under your deck to keep it from becoming a fuel bed for hot embers.

4. Move woodpiles and garbage cans away from the home 30 feet or more.

5. Use fine mesh metal screen (1/4”) or less to cover eaves, roof and foundation vents to prevent embers from entering.

6. Inspect and clean your chimney every year. Trim away branches within 10 feet. Install a spark arrestor with 1/2 inch mesh screen.

7. Got a propane tank? Get rid of any flammable materials within 10 feet of it and, if possible, position it at least 30 feet from any structures.

8. Window screens should be metal not plastic or other flammable material.

**DEFENSIBLE SPACE ZONE (100 ft)**

Your “defensible space” is the area that is a minimum of 100 feet from your home (as required under the State Public Resources Code 4291 or other local ordinances). This is the area where you’ve modified the landscape to allow your house to survive on its own-greatly improving the odds for firefighters who are defending your home.

If your home is on a slope or subject to high winds, extending the distance beyond 100 feet is prudent.

Burning embers landing on wood shake roofs are one of the leading factors for losing your home to a wildfire. Replace your wood shake roof with non-flammable (Class-A) roofing materials such as asphalt shingles, tile, or metal.
Create a Defensible Space Zone by keeping in mind the three R’s of defensible space:

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**WILDFIRE FUEL REDUCTION ZONE**  
(The outlying area beyond the required defensible space)

Getting rid of the undergrowth and thinning out densely-crowded smaller trees in this outlying area will reduce fire intensity and slow the spread of a fire moving toward your home. Defensible space increases the odds of your home’s survival.

Experts recommend a minimum of 10 feet of spacing (on level ground) between individual trees and 2X the height for shrubs measured at the crown (widest part) of the tree or shrub. You will need to increase spacing even more on slopes.

Remember to plan for trees and shrubs at their full mature size when planning minimum crown to crown separation.

It’s possible, depending upon the size of your property, that you will be limited by your property boundary and unable to complete the fire safe measures identified in zones 2 and 3. If this happens, talk with your neighbors and ask their cooperation. A safer home means a safer neighborhood for everyone.
“When a wildfire comes through your neighborhood, could your home survive on its own?”

A dramatic question, but one we need to consider when living in an environment where wildfire is a threat. Firescaping is landscape design that reduces house and property vulnerability to wildfire. The goal is to develop a landscape with a design and choice of plants that offers the best protection and enhances the property. The ideal is to surround the house with things that are less likely to burn.

It is imperative when building homes in wildfire-prone areas that fire safety be a major factor in landscape design. Appropriate manipulation of the landscape can make a significant contribution toward wildfire survival.

**VEGETATIVE FUEL HAZARDS**

Vegetative fuels include living and dead native vegetation materials. The amount of heat energy released during a wildland fire is defined by the amount, arrangement, and rate of combustion of the vegetative fuels. Vegetative fuel flame lengths can exceed 100 feet and the radiated heat can ignite combustible materials from distances of 100 feet or more. Winds can carry live firebrands for several miles.

Firescape integrates traditional landscape functions and a design that reduces the threat from wildfire. It does not need to look much different from a traditional design. In addition to meeting a homeowner’s aesthetic desires and functional needs such as entertaining, playing, storage, and erosion control, firescape also includes vegetation modification techniques, planting for fire safety, defensible space principals and use of fire safety zones.

Mitigation of wildfire hazards focuses on breaking up the continuity of horizontal and vertical fuels. Additional distance between landscape plants is required on slopes.

Ornamental specimen trees can be used within 30 feet of structures if pruned properly, are well irrigated and separated from other trees. Keep tree limbs at least 10 feet from chimneys, power lines, and structures.

Firewise design uses driveways, lawns, walkways, patios, parking areas, areas with inorganic mulches, and fences constructed of nonflammable materials such as rock, brick, or cement to reduce fuel loads and create fuel breaks. Fuel breaks are vital components in every firescape design. Water features, pools, ponds, or streams can also be fuel breaks. Areas where wildland vegetation has been thinned or replaced with less flammable plants are the traditional fuel break. Remember, while bare ground is an effective fuel break, it is not recommended as a firescape element due to aesthetic, soil erosion, and other concerns.

A home located on a brushy site above a south or west facing slope will require more extensive wildfire safety landscape planning than a house situated on a flat lot with little vegetation around it.

Boulders and rocks become fire retardant elements in a design. Whether a site can be irrigated will greatly influence location of hardscape (concrete, asphalt, wood decks, etc.), plant selection and placement.

Prevailing winds, seasonal weather, local fire history, and characteristics of native vegetation surrounding the site are additional important considerations.

The 30 feet closest to a structure will be the highest water use area in the fire safe landscape. This is an area where highly flammable fuels are kept to a minimum and plants are kept green throughout the fire season.

**Remainder to provide separation & spacing**

Through proper plant selection, placement, and maintenance, we can diminish the possibility of ignition, lower fire intensity, and reduce how quickly a fire spreads, increasing a home’s survivability.

In firescaping, plant selection is primarily determined by the plant’s ability to reduce the wildfire threat. Other considerations may be important such as appearance, ability to hold the soil in place, and wildlife habitat value. The traditional foundation planting of junipers is not a viable solution in firescape design. Minimize use of evergreen shrubs within 30 feet of a structure, because junipers, other conifers, and broadleaf evergreens contain oils, resins, and waxes that make these plants burn with great intensity.

Use ornamental grasses and berries sparingly because they also can be highly flammable. Choose “fire smart” plants. They tend to be low growing, have a high moisture content, and have stems and leaves that are NOT resinous, oily or waxy. Deciduous trees are generally more fire resistant than evergreens because they have a higher moisture content when in leaf, but a lower fuel volume when dormant.

Placement and maintenance of trees and shrubs is as important as actual plant selection. When planning tree placement in the landscape, remember their size at maturity.
Use well-irrigated perennials here. Another choice is low growing or non-woody deciduous plants. Lawn is soothing visually, and is also practical as a wildfire safety feature. But extensive areas of turf grass may not be right for everyone. Some good alternatives include clover, groundcovers and conservation grasses that are kept green during the fire season through irrigation. Rock mulches are good choices. Patios, masonry or rock planters are excellent fuel breaks and increase wildfire safety. Be creative with boulders, riprap, dry streambeds and sculptural inorganic elements.

When designing a landscape for fire safety remember less is better. Simplify visual lines and groupings. A firesafe landscape lets plants and garden elements reveal their innate beauty by leaving space between plants and groups of plants. In firescaping, the open spaces are more important than the plants.

**INVASIVE PLANTS AND WEEDS**

An invasive weed is any species that is, or is liable to become detrimental, or destructive to native ecosystems, and for purposes of this publication - represent an increased FIRE Hazard! They are aggressive, competitive, and difficult to control or eradicate. They compete with native plants and often force them out. Invasive plants threaten the ecological integrity of our precious wildlands. Many invasive weeds and trees are extremely fire prone and can increase the fire threat to your home and property if not removed.

You may be familiar with some of the more common invasive plants such as French and Scotch Broom; Yellow, Italian and Purple Distaff; Star Thistle; Barbed Goat Grass; Cape Ivy; Medusa Head; Pampas Grass; and Acacia to name a few.

Surprisingly, our native Douglas Fir is becoming a problem as it is vigorously reproducing and is rapidly becoming one of the most fire prone conifers in Sonoma County.

Invasive plants and weeds are opportunistic and often establish themselves in disturbed soils along newly graded drives, roads and construction sites.

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**Fire-Wise Plant Material for Sonoma County**

Although there are no fireproof plant materials, the following is a list of some firewise plants that can be used in landscaping for fire prevention. Landscape maintenance is far more important to fire prevention than the selection of plant materials. When planning your landscape, use the characteristics of firewise-plants along with site characteristics such as slope, aspect, hardness zone and amount of precipitation to choose plant material for your site.

### TREES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common name</th>
<th>Value natives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Big Leaf Maple</td>
<td>Acer macrophyllum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Alder</td>
<td>Alnus rhombifolia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Dogwood</td>
<td>Cornus nuttalli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oaks</td>
<td>Platanus racemosa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oak</td>
<td>Quercus spp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coast Redwood</td>
<td>Sequoia sempervirens</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Ornamental Garden Trees:

- Acer spp.
- Arbutus unedo
- Cercis occidentalis
- Cercocarpus betuloides
- Citrus spp.
- Fagus spp.
- Feijoa sellowiana
- Fraxinus spp.
- Gleditsia triacanthos
- Macadamia hybrids
- Metrosideros excelsus
- Myoporum spp.
- Pistacia chinensis
- Pittosorus spp.
- Rhus lancea
- Robinia pseudoacacia
- Schinus molle
- Schinus terebinthifolius

### SHRUBS

#### Native Wildland Plants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common name</th>
<th>Domestic Garden Shrubs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bush Anemone</td>
<td>Carpenteria californica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wild Lilac</td>
<td>Croneos (some) spp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush Poppy</td>
<td>Dendromecon rigidia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sisk Tassel</td>
<td>Garrya app.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toyon, Christmas Berry</td>
<td>Heteromeles arbutifolia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malva Rose</td>
<td>Lavatera assurgentiflora</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creeping Mahonia</td>
<td>Mahonia repens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catalina Cherry</td>
<td>Punus lyoni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buckthorn/Chickenberry</td>
<td>Rhamnus spp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Flower Currant</td>
<td>Rhus integrioflia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nightshade, Blue Watch</td>
<td>Ribes sanguineum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California Fuchsia</td>
<td>Solanum umbelliferum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Domestic Garden Shrubs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common name</th>
<th>Non-Succulents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angel’s Trumpet</td>
<td>Achillea tomentosa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butterfly Bush</td>
<td>Ajuja reptans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush Morning Glory</td>
<td>Armeria maritime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likiano</td>
<td>Coprosma kirkii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock Cotoneaster</td>
<td>Duchesnea indica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rockspray Cotoneaster</td>
<td>Festuca rubra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bearberry Cotoneaster</td>
<td>Liriope gigantean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Echium or Friedroot</td>
<td>Myoporum parvifolium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escallonia</td>
<td>Oleander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese Privet</td>
<td>Osteospermum fruiticosum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glossy Privet</td>
<td>Nolina spp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas Privet</td>
<td>Pittosporum crassifolium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oleander</td>
<td>Pittosporum tobira</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punica granatum</td>
<td>Pumica Orange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pyracantha “Santa Cruz”</td>
<td>Firethorn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raphiolepis spp.</td>
<td>India Hawthorn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhamnus alaterus</td>
<td>Italian Buckthorn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhododendron (Azalea spp.)</td>
<td>Rhododendrons &amp; Azaleas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simmondsia chinensis</td>
<td>Thymus praecox arcticus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Star Jasmine</td>
<td>Trachelospermum jasminoides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Periwinkle</td>
<td>Vinca spp.*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican Daisy</td>
<td>Yucca</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### PERENNIALS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common name</th>
<th>Succulents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yarrow</td>
<td>Delosperma “Alba”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lily of the Nile</td>
<td>Echeveria spp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bergenia</td>
<td>Sedum confusum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dusty Miller</td>
<td>White Trailing Iceplant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Valerian</td>
<td>Hens &amp; Chicks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coreopsis</td>
<td>Stonecrop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Iris</td>
<td>Woolly Yarrow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fortnight Lily</td>
<td>Carpet Bugle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican Daisy</td>
<td>Common Thrift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geranium</td>
<td>Bird of Paradise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daylily</td>
<td>Society Garlic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Yucca</td>
<td>Common Calla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Island Alum Root</td>
<td>California Fuchsia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### GROUND COVERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common name</th>
<th>Non-Succulents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White Trailing Iceplant</td>
<td>Achillea tomentosa</td>
</tr>
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<td>Ajuja reptans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stonecrop</td>
<td>Armeria maritime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creeping Coprosma</td>
<td>Duchesnea indica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mock Strawberry</td>
<td>Festuca rubra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creeping Red Fescue</td>
<td>Liriope gigantean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giant Turf Lily</td>
<td>Myoporum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Excerpted in part from “Pyropytic Vs. Fire Resistant Plants” by Ray Moritz & Pavel Svhra
Firewise Construction Checklist

Wildfire and your home ignition Zone - Is your home ignition prone?

How a house is designed, where it is built, materials used in its construction, landscaping, and access all influence survivability during a wildfire. Presented below are recommendations and illustrations that will make a home much easier to defend and will improve its chances of surviving a wildfire with or without direct firefighting intervention.

Choose a firewise location if you are constructing a new home.

Survivable Space is similar to Defensible Space, except it emphasizes the house surviving without significant firefighter or homeowner action. It combines Defensible Space with ignition resistant construction methods and materials, many of which can be retrofitted to existing homes.

Ignition Resistant Construction + Defensible Space = Survivable Space!

Slope of Terrain: Be sure to build on the most level portion of the land, since fire spreads more rapidly on even minor slopes. Avoid building on mid-slopes and away from ridge tops, canyons and areas between high points on a ridge.

Locating a Home on your lot or acreage: Set your single-story structure at least 30 feet back from any ridge or slope; increase distance if your home will be higher than one story. Try not to build on mid-slope sites.

Consider or add ignition resistant construction elements for your new or existing home.

Design, build or maintain a firewise structure utilizing passive ignition resistant measures. Use or replace construction materials that are ignition-resistant whenever possible. Use construction methods that resist ignition and fire infiltration.

Survivable Space is similar to Defensible Space, except it emphasizes the house surviving without significant firefighter or homeowner action. It combines Defensible Space with ignition resistant construction methods and materials, many of which can be retrofitted to existing homes.

**Soffits, Eaves, Decks, Balconies and Overhangs.** Soffit SOFF it n. “The exposed underside of any overhead structural component of a building, such as eaves, balconies, decks, beams, arches, cornices and lintels.”

Open Eaves, Decks and Overhangs can all act as heat traps and make the building more vulnerable to flying embers and brands and intense heat from nearby fire.

Eaves Enclosed - box in soffits and under eave areas with “one-hour” rated material.

Decks can act as heat traps and can be ignited by wind driven flying embers and fire brands. Use skirting to enclose or box underside of deck with “one hour” rated covering.

Enclose the underside of balconies and above-ground decks with fire resistant materials.

**Composite Lumber:** Many different companies manufacture composite lumber, each with its own proprietary formula and structural design. It is primarily used in outdoor decks and railings. It may be in the form of solid boards or may contain hollow areas. Composite lumber is a mix of plastic, wood binder and other ingredients that may provide ignition resistance inferior to wood products. When burning, composite materials tend to drip flaming liquefied plastic that “pools” on the surface below and continues to burn intensely. The State Fire Marshal’s Office has flammability test results available. As with wood decking, it is crucial to protect the underside of any deck and keep cracks and crevices free of any debris.

**Window Materials** and size are important. Smaller panes hold up better in their frames than larger ones. Double or triple pane especially with tempered glass and Low-E reflectivity are even more effective heat barriers than single pane glass. Avoid use of plastic window framing and use metal, not plastic screening.

**Interior Residential Fire Sprinklers** are important because they have proven to extinguish undetected fire when the structure is occupied or unoccupied.
Interior residential fire sprinkles may extinguish fire originating from an exterior source, i.e. a wildland fire where radiant, convective heat or direct flame contact has caused structural failure that allows fire intrusion into the building. They may also prevent a house fire from spreading to the wildlands.

Shutters: Install non-flammable shutters on windows. This is a particularly good measure for weekend homes that are not continuously occupied but is also appropriate for homes that are.

Vents: To prevent sparks from entering your home through vents, cover exterior soffit, attic, roof and under floor vents with wire mesh no larger than 1/4 inch mesh or less. Attic vents are not recommended.

Use of Plastic exterior building components such as siding, decks, vents, skylights, gutters and downspouts and certain window frames can melt and/or ignite and should not be used. Use metal components where possible.

Gutters are best if eliminated completely. Utilize gravel filled French Drain under dripline instead. If gutters are necessary, maintain gutters and roofs (particularly valleys) clear of leaves and other debris. No Plastic!

Attachments include any structures connected directly to your home such as decks, porches, balconies, fences, gates, breezeways or accessory buildings.

Attachments can act as fuel bridges, or fire fuses! If an attachment to a home is not ignition resistant, then the home may be at risk.

If you choose to attach a fence to your home, use masonry or metal, or distance as a protective barrier between it and the house. A wrought iron style gate separating a combustible fence may provide some protection.

Build an ignition resistant fence and gate. Use metal when constructing a trellis and cover it with high-moisture, low flammability vegetation.

Exterior Vertical Structural Members such as Combustible Posts or Columns: Vertical members that support decks, balconies and overhangs that are not protected by ground to deck skirting should be clad with galvanized or copper sheathing to at least 1 - 3-feet above ground OR built on concrete footings at least 1-foot above grade.

ACCESS

Identify at least two exit routes from your neighborhood. Design roads and drives for large emergency vehicles.

Construct roads or provide turnouts that allow two-way traffic.

Design bridges to carry heavy emergency vehicles, including bulldozers carried on large trucks.

Post clear road signs to show traffic restrictions such as dead-end roads and weight and height limitations.

Make sure dead-end roads and long driveways have turnaround areas wide enough for emergency vehicles. Clear turnouts along one-way roads.

Construct driveways to allow large emergency equipment to reach your house.

Clear dry grass and flammable brush up to ten feet from roads and five feet from driveways. Retention of mature trees along roadside OK.

Make sure that your street is named or numbered and a sign is visibly posted at each street intersection.

Make sure that your street name and number is not duplicated elsewhere in the county.

Post your home address in CONTRASTING BOLD 4-inch letters at the beginning of your driveway or on your house if it is easily visible.

EMERGENCY WATER SUPPLY

Maintain an emergency water supply that meets fire department standards through one of the following:
• A community water/hydrant system
• A cooperative emergency water storage tank with neighbors
• A minimum dedicated (for fire) storage supply of 2,500 gallons on your property. More may be required or prudent.
• Clearly mark all emergency water sources and notify your local fire department of their existence.
• Create easy firefighter access to your closest emergency water source.

INSPECTION & MAINTENANCE

Make periodic inspections of your home, looking for deterioration such as breaks and spaces between roof tiles, warping wood, or cracks and crevices, rodent entry points in the structure. Prevent combustible materials and debris including dry grass from accumulating beneath patio decks or elevated porches. Screen or enclose areas below decks with wire mesh screen no larger than 1/4 inch mesh OR less, even better construct skirting from the deck to the ground of ignition resistant materials.

All the defensible space in the world is useless if you don’t conduct regular maintenance!

Stack woodpiles at least 30 feet from all structures and clear flammable vegetation within 10 feet of woodpiles.

One cord of firewood contains 20 million BTUs of heat energy, or the equivalent of 160 gallons of gasoline. Do you want that near your home?

Locate propane tanks at least 30 feet from any structure and surround them with 10 feet of clearance. Be sure that your tank has seismic tie downs.

Remove all stacks of construction materials, pine needles, leaves and other debris from your yard.

Remove dead branches hanging over your roof.

Remove any branches within 10 feet of your chimney.

Clean all dead leaves and needles from your roof and gutters.

Install a roof that meets Class “A” rating requirements.

Cover your chimney outlet and stovepipe with a non-flammable screen of one-half inch mesh.

This Checklist is not intended to replace official building code requirements, but hopes to offer suggestions when considering firesafe ignition resistant construction methods. Remember that your home may be part of the problem.

In designing or upgrading your firewise ignition resistant home, remember that the goal is to complement it with adequate defensible space.

For additional information and links to other useful websites go to the Fire Safe Sonoma home page: www.firesafesonoma.org
CAUSES OF HOME IGNITION FROM WILDFIRES

During a wildland fire, three conditions stand out as ignition threats to homes and outbuildings.

**WIND DRIVEN EMBERS** and firebrands blown ahead of the fire that land in areas that catch or trap them. Heat traps include roof valleys & gutters, open eaves, soffits, overhangs, or under decks and balconies.

**DIRECT FLAME CONTACT** from flammable native or urban landscaping, attached wood fences and accumulation or storage of flammable materials against the house or under decks.

**RADIANT HEAT** generally from flammable vegetation or adjacent burning homes that are too close to your home.

Note that 50% of the houses with wood roofs and less than 30 feet of vegetation clearance were destroyed by wildfire. But less than 1% of the homes with fire resistant roofs and 100 feet of clearance were destroyed.

**THE LIMITATIONS OF WILDLAND FIREFIGHTING**

A lot of people assume that when a wildfire starts, it will be quickly controlled and extinguished. This is accurate 97% of the time. The vast majority of these fires are small fires in small fuels. Firefighters have the ability, equipment, and technology to effectively suppress most wildfires. But 3% of the time wildfires burn so intensely that there is little firefighters can do.

Presented at right are firefighter tactics as they relate to common wildland fuels.

**FUEL TYPE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fuel Type</th>
<th>Effective Suppression Tactics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grassland</td>
<td>Where accessible, suppression by fire engines using hose lines is the method of choice. Fireline constructed with hand tools can also be effective. Fire engines with water and hose lines will be needed to knock down the fire. Air tankers, helicopters and bulldozers may be required.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coastal Scrub Brush (less than 4’ tall)</td>
<td>Air tankers with fire suppressing retardant &amp; helicopters are required to reduce the fire’s rate of spread before engines, fire crews or bulldozers can be effective. Burning out vegetation between the fireline and the advancing fire may be necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy Chaparral (a mix of brush types 4’-15’ tall containing a large amount of dead material)</td>
<td>Direct fire suppression ineffective! Fire will need to be fought using roads, streams and natural barriers. Burning out may be necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dense Conifer Forest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If your home or neighborhood is threatened by wildfire, occupants may be advised to evacuate. Your Family Emergency Plan should be in place and practiced regularly by all family members before an emergency occurs! Include the following recommendations at a minimum. When in doubt - EVACUATE!

**Pre-Fire & Emergency Preparations:**
- Develop a family emergency plan
- Meet with your family and discuss the types of disasters that could occur
- Have a broad-based plan that will work for most disasters including wildfire
- Discuss where to go and what to bring if advised to evacuate
- Determine and discuss two evacuation routes
- Show responsible family members how, where and when to shut off water, gas and electricity at main controls.
- Practice what you have discussed
- Plan how your family will stay in contact if separated by disaster
- Pick two meeting places: (1) a place a safe distance from home in case of a home fire; (2) a place outside your neighborhood in case you can’t return home.
- Choose an out-of-area friend as a “check-in contact” for everyone to call & make sure they have the phone numbers.
- Relay your plans to the contact person

**WHEN WILDFIRE APPROACHES**

**What should I have with me?**
- Wear only cotton or wool clothes
- Safe attire includes long pants, long sleeved shirt or jacket and boots
- Warm clothing for cold nights
- Carry gloves, goggles, a handkerchief to cover your face and water to drink
- Keep a flashlight and portable radio with you at all times
- Tune in to a local radio station and listen for instructions

**What about family members and pets?**
- Stay together
- Evacuate all family members and pets
- Capture your pets early as there will be confusion. Restrain them by leash, locked in a bedroom or kennel cage.

**How should I prepare my car?**
- Place the vehicle in the garage, pointing out with keys in ignition - don’t lock keys in car
- Place essential items in the car
- Roll up all windows when departing from the garage
- Always keep the tank at least half full
- Disconnect the electric garage door opener so that the door can be opened manually
- Close garage door upon leaving

**What should I take?**
- Important documents (bank, IRS, trust, investment, insurance policies, birth certificates, passports and medical records)
- Credit and ATM cards
- Medications
- Prescription glasses & spares
- Driver’s license
- Passport
- Computer backup files
- Inventory of home contents (consider video taping)
- Photographs of the exterior of the house and landscape
- Address book
- Cell phone and charger
- Personal toiletries
- Change of clothing for each family member
- Family photo albums and videos
- Family Heirlooms

**How should I leave my home?**
- Close all interior doors
- Leave a light on in each room
- Remove lightweight, non-fire-resistant curtains and other combustible materials around windows
- Close fire resistant drapes
- Move over stuffed furniture such as couches and easy chairs to the center of the room
- Shut off main gas supply to house
- Know two or more ways out

**What about the outside of my home?**
- Shut off propane at the tank or natural gas at the meter
- Show responsible family members how and when to shut off water, gas and electricity at main controls
- Close all exterior vents if possible
- Prop a ladder against the house to provide firefighters with access to the roof
- Make sure all garden hoses are connected and have spry nozzles attached
- Close all exterior doors and windows
- Leave exterior doors unlocked
- Turn on outside lights
- If available and there is time, cover windows, attic openings and vents with plywood that is at least one-half inch thick

**If you have an emergency water source (pool, pond, etc.) and/or portable pump, clearly mark its availability so it can be seen from the street, Do this now, not when the fire comes.**

**WHEN EVACUATION IS NECESSARY**

TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE. REMEMBER, MATERIAL THINGS CAN BE REPLACED - FAMILY MEMBERS CANNOT!

If a fire should occur within the house or the wildland around it, contact the fire department immediately. Continue to inspect your house and property for flame or embers.

**Most importantly, STAY CALM!**
This publication was compiled by Fire Safe Sonoma. Fire Safe Sonoma is dedicated to reducing the Wildland Fire Threat and improving Fire Safety awareness throughout Sonoma County. Visit us at www.firesafesonoma.org.

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State Farm Insurance
www.statefarm.com

Fire Safe Sonoma
www.firesafesonoma.org
707-565-1152

Sonoma County Department of Emergency Services
www.sonoma-county.org/des

California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
www.fire.ca.gov/php

Soroptimists International of Santa Rosa
www.sisantarosa.org

Sonoma County Fire Chiefs Association

Sonoma County Fire Chiefs Association
Fire Prevention Officer's Section

Santa Rosa Firefighter’s Association
International Association of Firefighters
Local 1401

Rincon Valley FPD

Gold Ridge FPD

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www.livingwithfire.info/

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Fire Agencies of Sonoma County
Community Service Area #40
Volunteer Fire Departments:
c/o Sonoma County Department of Emergency Services - 565-1152

Annapolis
Bloomfield
Bodega
Camp Meeker
Fort Ross
Knights Valley
Lakeville
Mayacamas
Mountain
San Antonio
The Sea Ranch
Sotoyome
Two Rock
Valley Ford
Wilmar

Fire Protection Districts
City Fire Departments:

Bennett Valley FPD - 578-7761
Bodega Bay FPD - 875-3700
California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection - 576-2285
Cazadero CSD - 632-5482
Cloverdale FPD - 894-3545
Fire Safe Sonoma - 565-1152
Forestville FPD - 887-2212
Geyerville FPD - 857-3535
Glen Ellen FPD - 996-9266
Gold Ridge FPD - 823-1084
Graton FPD - 823-5515
Healdsburg FD - 431-3360
Kenwood FPD - 833-2042
Monte Rio FPD - 865-2067
Occidental CSD - 874-3800
Petaluma FD - 778-4390
Rancho Adobe FPD - 795-6011
Rincon Valley FPD - 539-1801
Rohnert Park DPS - 584-2650
Roseland FPD (Santa Rosa) - 543-3500
Russian River FPD - 869-9089
Santa Rosa FD - 543-3500
Schell-Vista FPD - 938-2633
Sebastopol FD - 823-8061
Sonoma County Department of Emergency Services - 565-1152
Sonoma Development Center - 938-6333
Sonoma Valley FD - 996-2102
Timber Cove FPD - 847-3368
Two Rock Coast Guard FD - 765-7355
Windsor FPD - 838-1170

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