

Plant Now for Firescaping

Firescaping is a relatively new term in the field of landscaping. It means creating non-burn zones around your home. When a wildfire comes through, it takes everything in its path--including houses--unless there is no path for the fire to follow. The idea behind firescaping is to minimize the path a fire can take. This means the closer to your home, the less vegetation you want. Ideally, there are three defensible zones in firescaping.

Zone 1 -Involves clearing a 30-foot area surrounding a house. Cut all trees and brush that could easily lead a fire to the front door. Concrete or brick patios in this area are ideal as well as low ornamental shrubs. This is the zone to plant deciduous trees. Remove branches within 15 feet of chimneys and stovepipes.

Zone 2 moves out another 70 feet, called the mid-zone. This area is for orchards and gardens. The lower limbs of trees should be pruned to 15 feet off the ground. On steep slopes keep plantings far apart to discourage a wildfire from climbing up a hill; fire travels uphill fast.

Zone 3 is no closer than 100 feet from the house. Thin trees so their crowns are apart by at least 10 feet. Prune branches to a height of 10 feet from the ground. The goal is to keep a fire from "laddering". This is when low brush ignites lower branches. Then those flaming branches climb a tree and jump to the crown, the treetops. When this happens, fires are out of control. Create fuel breaks wherever possible with pools, fountains and non-flammable fences. Lay rock, gravel, brick and paving in wide-open areas. If you live in the mountains, rake up the pine needles.

Also, the types of plants near a home are an essential part of firescaping. Listed below are only a few plants and trees that have proved useful in slowing or stopping a fire from spreading.

Trees--

Maple, Birch, Hawthorn, Ash, Honey Locust, Apple, Cottonwood, Aspen and Willow

Shrubs--

Agave, Four Wing Saltbush, Mountain Mahogany, Chamisa, Forsythia, Russian Sage, Dogwood, Serviceberry and Mahonia

Vines--

Clematis, Virginia Creeper, Grape and all varieties of Wisteria

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Visit the Santa Fe Greenhouses and pick up one of the handouts for more fire resistant plants.