

Year Round Gardening

Fire Wise Landscaping

Fredricka Bogardus, Colorado Master Gardener

Fire danger is high. Our warm, windy, dry weather creates optimal conditions for wildfire to spread. You cannot fireproof your landscape, but you can make it easier for fire fighters to defend your home, and a little less likely it will contribute to the spread of a fire.

Reduce fuel

Keep dry grasses around your home trimmed. Remove dead limbs from trees, clean up brown leaves preferably in autumn, or early spring. If you use wood-based mulch do not use it immediately adjacent to your home. Woodpiles for fires should be as far as possible from your home. Move any easily combustible materials at least 30' from your home.

If you have scrub oak on your property thin the trees, remove diseased trees and limb them up at least 6' above any other vegetation.

Prune back any tree branches that touch any part of your home.

If you are adding or replacing a wooden deck or other attached structure consider a less flammable material than wood.

Photo courtesy of Fredricka Bogardus

Ember attack and fire ladders

A phenomenon known as 'ember attack' can quickly spread a fire from a forested area to residential neighborhoods. Burning parts of trees such as twigs, pinecones, or leaves become airborne and can travel up to a mile away in high winds. If the embers land on combustible material a fire can be ignited.

Fire ladders are routes for a ground fire to travel to taller

vegetation which will be a source of embers. The photo above depicts some unmaintained pine trees on a residential property. A small grass fire in this setting would quickly turn into a conflagration because of the dead tree limbs in direct contact with the very dry grass. Ideally there should be at least 6 feet of empty space between lower planted grasses and shrubs, and tree limbs.



In the wildland interfaces of our city it is important to remember that while fire is a natural renewal process for forests, we want to avoid having our homes burn. We should manage our urban 'forest' to reduce that risk.

Consider fire-wise plant materials

While all plants will burn, some are more easily ignited. Factors to consider when selecting plants include, water content, resin content, and growth habit. A comprehensive discussion of plant selection for fire resistance can be found at Colorado State University Extension fact sheet Fire Wise Plant Materials – 6.305 (<http://extension.colostate.edu/topic-areas/natural-resources/firewise-plant-materials-6-305/>).

Consider the use of rock, gravel and stepping stones as a way to potentially alter the path of fire. These non-combustible enhancements can slow the spread of fire and add interest and texture to your garden.

Plants near your house should be widely spaced, in clusters rather than dense plantings. While most herbaceous plants will not substantially contribute to fire risk, good spacing will further reduce the risk that they will ignite and contribute to a fire spreading.

For more information on fire mitigation visit the Colorado Springs Fire Department website at <https://coloradosprings.gov/fire-department/page/wildfire-mitigation> or call 719-385-7342.

You can have a beautiful garden and be fire safe too.

When you have questions, CSU Extension has research-based answers. Get answers to your horticulture questions at ask.extension.org or visit the office at 17 N. Spruce Street. Help Desk hours are Monday to Thursday from 9 am – 12 pm, phone 520-7684 or email CSUmq2@elpasoco.com. For upcoming events visit <http://elpaso.extension.colostate.edu/>