Firewise Landscaping

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Highlights

- Why firewise?
- Key words and definitions
- How does fire spread?
- Design approaches
- Maintenance practices
- Plant selection
- Favorite species
- Questions?
Key Words

- Firewise
- Wildland-Urban Interface
- Ignition resistant
- Defensible space
- Hardening
- Ladder fuels
- Home Ignition Zone
- Foundation planting
What does it mean to be Firewise?

- Applying the best current knowledge about how to live safely and sustainably in a location vulnerable to fire.
- Can and should be updated as new information becomes available.
- Principles can be applied to the design of buildings, landscapes, parks, and roadways.
- As it applies to structures and the surrounding landscape, the term “ignition resistant” is also used.
What does it mean to be Firewise?

...how to live safely and sustainably in a location vulnerable to fire.

More and more homes are being built in the Wildland-Urban Interface, or WUI

Defined as: the area where forests and human development overlap
Feedback loop in which pristine wildland that would have historically had periodic wildfire events are very appealing to developers. After development wildfire is suppressed. Fire suppression can contribute to increased severity of a wildfire.
How does fire spread?

- **Embers** – can travel long distances and ignite spot fires separate from main fire

- **Fuels** – avoid leaving **ladder fuels** which help fire to spread upwards

- **Combustible materials** serving as bridge or a fuse
Embers generated during the Camp Fire. Photo: CAL FIRE and U.S. Fire Administration
Pay attention to where plant debris collects, since embers are likely to end up in those same places.
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The Home Ignition Zone (HIZ)

The home and the area around the home (or structure). The HIZ takes into account both the potential of the structure to ignite and the quality of defensible space surrounding it.

Illustration: Bonnie Palmatory, Colorado State University
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Zone 1 - The First 5 Feet

- In order to help prevent flames from coming into direct contact with the structure.

- If structure has siding of wood or other flammable material, install nonflammable groundcover within the first 5 feet of structure and decks and plant nothing.

- If structure has noncombustible siding such as stucco or brick, widely spaced, low-growing plants can be planted.
Zone 1 - The First 5 Feet

• If planting withing the first 5 feet, do not plant directly under windows or vents.

• Do not allow continuous areas of grass adjacent to foundation plantings.

• Remove all trees from zone 1. If you keep any trees in zone 1, consider it a part of the structure and extend the distance of zone one accordingly.
Rethinking foundation plantings

Photo courtesy of Monrovia
Foundation plantings

• Avoid resinous plants

• Avoid plants which accumulate a lot of needles or dry material around and inside growing zone

• Plant only low-growing varieties

• Use gravel mulch, whereever possible

• Blow or rake out loose, fallen plant material seasonally, where practical

• Provide space between plants and spread noncombustable mulch between
The Home Ignition Zone (HIZ)

The home and the area around the home (or structure). The HIZ takes into account both the potential of the structure to ignite and the quality of defensible space surrounding it.
• Creating purposeful fuel breaks

• Limb up existing trees to 10 feet above the ground, if possible. (Never prune more than 1/3 of the crown in 1 year.)

• Thin existing trees to 10 foot spacing.

• Plan to plant any new trees with 20–25 foot spacing to allow for future growth.

• Remove dead or diseased trees and plants in a timely manner.
Additional design considerations

• Integrate purposeful fuel breaks

• Consider arrangement of plants and materials that will facilitate ease of maintenance

• Adopt an attitude of “not if, but when”
  (If your home is in a flood zone, you get flood insurance)

• “Harden” your design by incorporating stone wherever possible
Firewise Plants

The best Firewise (or Ignition Resistant) plants are:

- Succulent
- High moisture
- Low resin
- Thrive in gravel mulch
• Allium ‘Millenium’

• Delosperma nubigenum
  AKA Ice Plant
  ‘Hardy Yellow’
- Centranthus ruber Jupiter’s Beard AKA Red Valerian

- Iris germanica German Iris
  - Siberian and Japanese Iris are also great!

- Ajuga reptans AKA Bugleweed, Carpet Bugle
Ajuga reptans ‘Burgundy Glow’
Heuchera ‘Alabama Sunrise’
Saponaria x lempergii, Soapwort ‘Max Frei’
Campanula rotundifolia Blue Harebell

Sedum ‘Firecracker’
Vinca minor ‘Illumination’
Veronica Reavis, Speedwell and Veronica prostrata, Prostrate Speedwell

Yucca filamentosa, ‘Color guard’
Thymus, ssp., Red Thyme

Allium schoenoprasum, Culinary Chives

Cerastium tomentosum, Snow-in-Summer
Firewise Landscaping Resources

Home Ignition Zone
_Colorado State Forest Service

Defensible Space Quick Guide__ Colorado State Forest Service

Firewise Plant Materials__ Colorado State University Extension