

Fire Resistant Landscaping

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is fire resistant landscaping?

A: Fire resistant landscaping is designed to reduce your home's vulnerability to wildfire. The key is to develop and design a landscape with plants that offers fire protection and enhancement to the property.

Q: To be fire resistant do I need to remove all existing shrubs?

A: Not necessarily. Fire resistant landscaping consists of the selective removal of existing vegetation to reduce fire fuel volume and then replacing the landscape with fire resistant and fire retardant plants. To be fire resistant, landscaping elements should not promote the forward movement of fire. Fire resistant plants can regenerate growth, despite burning. Fire retardant plants are those that are less flammable than others. No plant is fire proof; given enough heat, all vegetation will burn. Yet plants do differ in how fast they burn, how high a flame they produce, and their ability to survive a fire.

Q: Can I have flowerbeds next to my home's foundation?

A: Yes. A well-maintained and watered flowerbed is acceptable along your foundation.

Q: Do I have to clear out all vegetation to be fire safe?

A: Absolutely not! You can have beautiful lush gardens while reducing your fire threat. Keep in mind when you plan or design your landscape that each section of your gardens should not promote fire spread from one area to the next. Fire resistant landscaping uses driveways, lawns, walkways, patios, water features, fences constructed of non-flammable materials such as rock or brick, and large boulders or rock groupings. These features reduce the amount of fuel around the home and break up the continuity of the landscape.

Q: Can I make my existing landscape fire safe?

A: Yes. An established landscape can be made into a fire resistant garden. Look at the existing design and see if there are ladder fuels that would encourage the forward movement of a fire. If yes, then reduce the fire threat by removing the ladder fuels, thinning trees or brush and clearing out all dead materials. Start closest to the home and work outward. The most critical to your fire safety is the first 30 feet surrounding your home.

Q: What are ladder fuels?

A: Vegetation that allows a fire to move from lower growing plants to taller ones is referred to as “Ladder Fuels.” 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. The ladder fuel problem can be corrected by providing a separation between the vegetation layers.

Q: Does creating a fire resistant landscape require any special skills or equipment?

A: No. For the most part, creating a fire resistant space employs routine gardening and landscape maintenance practices such as pruning, mowing, weeding, plant removal, appropriate plant selection, and irrigation.

Q: Does having a fire resistant environment guarantee my home will survive a wildfire?

A: 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.

The Pacific Northwest region is an area where fire has always played a prominent role in the natural environment. Within this natural fire environment, there are individual houses, subdivisions, and entire communities. Many homes, however, would be unable to survive an intense wildfire. 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.