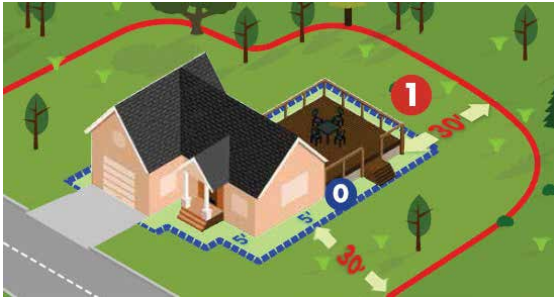


DEFENSIBLE SPACE & LANDSCAPING FOR FIRE SAFETY



In addition to implementing home hardening measures (see OCP&R Guide #09), creating defensible space and following fire-smart landscaping (firescaping) principles will greatly improve your home’s chance of surviving a wildfire. The overall approach is aimed at the **reduction and separation of combustibles** in order to protect structures from **three types of ignitions**: embers, radiant heat, and direct flames.

Defensible space strategy **creates a buffer** between buildings and surrounding grass, shrub, trees or wildland area. In addition to helping slow or stop the spread of wildfire, it also provides a **safer place for firefighters** to defend the property and enables **safe evacuation routes**.

ZONE 0 EMBER-RESISTANT

Zone 0 extends from 0’ - 5’ around your house and is the **most critical area** to ensure no easily combustible materials are present. Remove/reduce all fire hazards in this space!

- ❖ No easily combustible materials within 5’ of any structure
- ❖ Replace jute or natural fiber doormats with heavy rubber or metal grates. Remove/replace combustible outdoor furniture
- ❖ Use crushed stones or gravel instead of fine bark mulch
- ❖ Well-watered and green plants and small bushes can be ok
- ❖ Remove flammable materials on and underneath decks, patios or porches
- ❖ Remove tree limbs that extend into this zone and that hang over the roof or chimney closer than 10’
- ❖ Remove dry leaves and debris from the roof and rain gutters

ZONE 1 LEAN, CLEAN, & GREEN

Zone 1 extends approximately 5’ - 30’ out from buildings, decks and other structures. Maintain this area to be as fire-resistant as possible **throughout the year!**

- ❖ Remove all dead plants, grass and weeds
- ❖ Remove fire-prone vegetation and landscape using firescaping guidelines (**OCP&R Guide #14 – Fire-Smart Planting**)
- ❖ Limb tree branches 6’ or more up from ground level and 10’ away from other trees and flammables
- ❖ Create a separation between vegetation and items that can catch fire, such as patio furniture, sheds and play areas
- ❖ Cut or mow grasses and weeds down to a maximum height of 4 inches

BEYOND ZONE 1 REDUCED-FUEL AREA

Many sources recommend creating a defensible zone 30’ - 100’ away from structures, but in urban and residential areas this may not be possible. **Do all you can** within the boundaries of your property.

- ❖ Space trees apart depending on the ground slope, from 10’ minimum on flat ground to 30’ minimum on steep slopes
- ❖ Remove fallen leaves, needles, cones and small branches that are deeper than 3 inches on the ground
- ❖ Ensure that vegetation adjacent to roads and driveways is maintained in the same manner as Zone 1, and **keep roads firesafe for evacuation and first responder access**
- ❖ Work with your neighbors to reduce combustibles along your property lines
- ❖ Maintain your property year-round

DESIGN YOUR LANDSCAPE FOR FIRE SAFETY

FIRESCAPING is landscape design that reduces house and property vulnerability to wildfire. Careful firescape design will **reduce the chance of ignition**, lower a fire's intensity and slow the spread of fire – all to help your home survive and to give you more time to safely escape if necessary.

DESIGN your landscaping plan with plants and elements that provide the best possible fire protection. Use non-flammable hardscaping such as rocks and bricks for walls and paths. Create open areas to provide a buffer to help prevent flames from spreading. Understand that fire-smart plant selection is influenced by multiple factors (**OCP&R Guide #14 – Fire-Smart Planting**). Simple landscaping features that protect from flying embers, heat and flames can significantly improve your home's ability to survive a wildfire.

OTHER FIRESCAPING TECHNIQUES that help increase fire safety on your property include:

- ❖ Create fuel breaks with walkways, driveways, patios, islands, etc.
- ❖ Construct fences with non-flammable materials such as brick, rocks, metal or concrete
- ❖ Use a drip irrigation system tailored to individual plant's needs to keep them healthy during the dry season and to save water
- ❖ Use a fire-resistant compost mulch or thick bark to maintain moisture in the soil



***PLANNING & MAINTENANCE** are the two key factors in creating a fire-smart landscape.

MAINTAIN YOUR PROPERTY THROUGHOUT THE YEAR



PRUNING – As vegetation grows, the spacing between plants, bushes and trees is reduced. Regular pruning helps maintain this spacing and removes the dead foliage that enables even a fire-resistant plant to burn. Larger bushes and shrubs should be pruned up to reduce the chance that they can become ladder-fuels for trees and structures.

RAKE & CLEAN – Many types of bushes and trees drop their leaves regularly, especially in the fall when the fire season is at its peak. Rake and clean the ground as often as needed, and pay special attention to the area around the foundation of your home to make sure that it is leaf-litter free.



WHEN USING POWER TOOLS such as weed-whackers, chain saws and lawn mowers, be very careful not to create sparks or spill fuel, which can start a wildfire. Make sure that these machines are maintained properly and that exhaust spark-arrestors are installed. Always use caution and **never use power tools during Red Flag Warning** days!

TACKLE VEGETATION ISSUES AS A COMMUNITY



REMEMBER
your community is only as firesafe as its least properly maintained area.

- ❖ Consider engaging Oakland's Adopt a Spot program to work on City lots that aren't being tended to.
- ❖ If a resident is unable to maintain their own property, you can come together as neighbors to create a **Firewise USA® Community** (**OCP&R Guide #12 – Firewise USA**) to help them and your community.
- ❖ If funds are needed to tackle large vegetation issues or to haul away debris, contact the Diablo Firesafe Council (www.diablofiresafe.org) to inquire about possible matching grants.



IN-DEPTH RESOURCE

"Reducing the Vulnerability of buildings to Wildfire: Vegetation & Landscaping Guidance" publication by UC ANR: anrcatalog.ucanr.edu/pdf/8695.pdf

OCP&R is a program of the Oakland Firesafe Council | www.oaklandfiresafecouncil.org

Thanking Firesafe Marin and UC ANR for their contribution to this content. Version 1.3 12/3/22

www.oaklandcpandr.org | 510.575.0916 | info@oaklandcpandr.org