



GRAPHICS BY CHRIS RUSCH

Plan fire-resistant zones around your home.

Fight fire with your landscape

Protect your home and garden using fire-resistant plants

CHRIS RUSCH

Q: A client called the Plant Clinic this week to ask, "What can I do to make my landscaping more wildfire-resistant?"

A: Douglas County has many wildfire-prone areas. These are located in our rural areas and Roseburg foothills.

Here, fire is a part of the landscape. As homes are built in these areas, special precautions must be taken by the homeowner to protect their property. There are several steps that can be taken to reduce the risk of a wildfire engulfing your house.

Use fire-resistant building materials. Keep your rooftop and gutters clear of buildup of fir needles and leaves. Stack firewood away from your house.

Use a zone concept when planning your landscape. Zone 1 is the area around your house, approximately a 30-foot perimeter. This is a great area for water features, decorative rock, and annuals.

Annuals are a good choice for fire-resistant landscapes if they are well watered and maintained. An irrigated lawn around the house serves as an effective fuel break. If you landscape with bark mulch or wood chips up against your home, make sure it remains moist.

Zone 2 is the area around your home, approximately a 100-foot perimeter. Fire resistant plants in this zone should have leaves that are moist and supple. Plants should have little dead material within the plant, and the sap should be water-like and not have a strong odor.

Most deciduous trees and shrubs are fire-resistant if they are maintained in a healthy condition. In areas where you cannot irrigate, plant native plants.

In the area outside of this, Zone 3, you can reduce hazardous fuels by thinning conifers and hardwoods so that tree crowns are not touching. Also, rake up leaves and dead material and prune tree limbs on the first 15-20 feet of their trunks.

Shrubs and trees that are highly flammable generally have fine, dry or dead leaves or needles within the plant. Their leaves, twigs and stems contain volatile waxes or oils and the leaves have

a strong order when crushed. The sap is gummy, resinous and has a strong order. Some have loose or papery bark. Highly flammable shrubs commonly planted include arborvitae, juniper, and Leyland cypress.

Fire-resistant plants are described in a 48-page guide, *Fire-Resistant Plants for Home Landscapes* (PNW 590), published by the OSU Extension Service. The guide is available free online at:

<https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/sites/catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/files/project/pdf/pnw590.pdf>.

Q: A client brought in some peppers from her garden to the OSU Extension Master Gardener Plant clinic recently and asked, "What is causing the discolored spots on my peppers?"

A: This summer has been one of the hottest on record in Douglas County. Many days recorded temperatures well over 90 degrees.

This intense heat and sun exposure can cause a burning or browning of plant tissue called sunscald. This is an abiotic stress. Even the most heat-seeking plants can get too much of a good thing.

Pepper sunscald is common when the plants are forming fruit in the late summer heat. Sunscald on pepper plants primarily affects the fruit, although the foliage may get white streaks and dry edges. White scars of tougher tissue are formed at the burned sites.

In immature peppers, the affected areas are light green. The areas can also appear dry and sunken. The fruit may crack and split where the scald occurs. Sometimes, cracking can allow bacteria or fungi into the fruit. In these cases, the fruit will soften and the burnt areas will become rotten.

Sunscald on pepper plants can also cause the fruit to get woody and tough and ruin it cosmetically.

There are some pepper varieties that are resistant to sunscald. Planting these will reduce the chance that the peppers will get damaged.

The best prevention is to encourage lots of foliage by growing healthy robust plants early on. Fertilize with an organic



PHOTO BY CHRIS RUSCH

Peppers can be sun-scalded during hot summer days.

fertilizer prior to fruit set and after fruit set for better leaf growth to shade the peppers.

Preventing sunscald on pepper fruit may require mechanical intervention. Row covers or forms erected with shade cloth have the ability to deflect much of the intense light and protect the plants from pepper sunscald.

Providing optimum pest control is another way to reduce the problem. Defoliation amplifies the sun's effects. Watch for pests and begin a treatment program right away.

Most of the damage on sun scalded peppers is cosmetic and the fruit is perfectly good to eat. Remove any fruit that has been affected before it

gets soft.

You may want to pare out the affected areas, especially where the fruit has gone mushy or is tough. Sometimes only the skin has been damaged and you can roast these peppers and pull off the skin.

Do you have a gardening question? Please email, call, or visit the Douglas County Master Gardener Plant Clinic at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, 541-672-4461, or 1134 S.E. Douglas Ave., Roseburg.

Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.