

Firescaping a unique kind of design in homes

Question: The phrase “firescaping” has been in the news recently. I’ve read that firescaping is a form of landscape design and routine maintenance to keep my home protected from potential wildfire risks; however, what specific steps should I take to achieve this goal?

Answer: The news of devastating wildfires in the west has caused many property owners to investigate practical ways to make our homes more resistant to wildfires. The concept of firescaping is to design a thirty foot zone around our homes with specific plants and landscape features that are less likely to burn, thereby reducing vulnerability to wildfires. For those who live on acres of land, the thirty foot zone would just be a starting point.

The 30 feet closest to any structure is the most important zone in firescaping. One component of your landscape design needs to include things like boulders, masonry, rock planters, brick, pavers, gravel and water features, such as a pool or pond. These hard surfaces will provide fire-breaks and increase the likelihood of your home



Linda Estep
Master Gardener

surviving a wildfire.

Another component is to select fire-resistant plants. By selecting plants that have specific characteristics, you can minimize the spread of wildfire and the damage to a structure. In general, fire-resistant plants are those that are low

growing, retain moisture and contain low sap or resin. Some examples of fire-resistant plants are rockrose, ice plant and succulents. Fire-resistant shrubs include hedging roses, bush honeysuckles, currant, cotoneaster, sumac and shrub apples. If you are going to plant trees, select hardwood trees such as maple, poplar and cherry.

By selecting fire-resistant plants, you are reducing the amount of available fuel to a fire. Fire-resistant does not mean fireproof, so with

that in mind, it is also critical to provide space between all plants. This will reduce the amount of available fuel. Wildfires can jump horizontally from shrub to shrub and tree to tree. The open space between plants (or between groups of plants) reduces the intensity of a wildfire and slows the spread of fire. Wildfires can also jump vertically, so you will need to create a significant separation between the shrubs and trees. The best defense would be to avoid planting shrubs

underneath trees.

Within the 30 foot zone, it is important to keep the plants green and growing, especially throughout fire season. Remove any dead vegetation and branches as well as piles of dead leaves and twigs under plants. Keep plants pruned to reduce the quantity of available fuel. Remove combustible leaves, pinecones and branches from your roof and gutters. Trim tree branches that overhang the roof and chimney. Keep grasses mowed. Stack your woodpile away

from the house. Use metal patio furniture instead of combustible patio furniture. Good landscape “housekeeping” will make a significant contribution in maintaining a landscape that may save your home from being destroyed by wildfire.

Do you have a gardening question? Please e-mail, call, or visit the Douglas County Master Gardeners Plant Clinic at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, 541-236-3052, or 1134 S.E. Douglas Ave., Roseburg.