

LANDSCAPING LESSONS by Justin White

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Fire-safe Landscaping for homeowners

As we have unfortunately come to experience on the West Coast, the warm and dry weather brings with it the potential for harmful wildfires. In the last several years California has suffered a devastating increase of fires raging across the state. This year set new records with more than 2 million acres burned, breaking the previous record from 2018 of 1.96 million acres.

Just as important as the men and women fighting the flames, property owners are responsible for creating defensible landscapes to help prevent the spread. Fire-safe landscapes are not just maintenance, it's an entire design, build and maintenance mindset for homes and businesses in high-risk areas. Protect your home, business and entire community by developing and maintaining the landscaping on your property with these safety regulations.

Creating a defensible space

To slow down or stop the spread of a fire reaching your home, a buffer needs to be put in place. This means deliberately clearing out the dead vegetation that surrounds your building, as well as consciously designing the layout. In accordance with state law, 100 feet of defensible spacing is required for all structures and homes. As explained by Cal Fire ([readyforwildfire.org/prepare-for-wildfire/get-ready/defensible-space/](https://www.readyforwildfire.org/prepare-for-wildfire/get-ready/defensible-space/)), the design of this defense is made up of two zones. Zone 1: 30 feet of "Lean, Clean & Green." This first perimeter of defense includes keeping tree branches 10 feet apart, removing dry needles and leaves from your roof, rain gutters or yard, and clearing out all dead weeds, grass or plants. Wood piles should also be relocated out of Zone 1 and into Zone 2.

Zone 2: 30-100 feet of "Reduced Fuel." The second zone requires both horizontal and vertical spacing between grass, trees and shrubs. Grass should also be mowed or cut down to a maximum 4-inch height. Prevent a vertical "fire ladder" by ensuring all large trees have a 6-foot clearance of plants below. When mapping out plant and tree horizontal spaces, note that the size of the plants and the steepness of the slope will also determine the distance required between them.

Fire-resistant plants and landscaping

In addition to upkeeping your land with firesafe protocols, choose specific materials and plants that are more resistant to fueling fire. No plant is fireproof, but certain types that retain moisture and grow close to the ground are safer options. A bonus is several of these plants can also be drought tolerant, so you'll be saving water as well. Strategic placement and spacing is important to consider; the further away from each other, the better. Construct walls, decks

and patios in a way that will create a line of resistance to fire. These seemingly small landscaping changes can make a big difference in your home's battle against deadly flames.

We live in one of the most fire susceptible communities in the Golden State and educating ourselves and our fellow neighbors on preventative measures is now more imperative than ever. Achieving a landscape that is both fire retardant and dazzling in appearance is possible.

The most important part of fire-safe landscaping is being cognizant of your current situation and taking decisive action to improve it. If you need help complying with defensible space standards or installing a landscape that promotes fire safety, reach out to Cal Fire, your local landscaping company, a landscape architect, or a consulting arborist.

Additionally, Cabrillo College is offering a twopart series on "How to Protect Our Homes and Communities from Wildfires" on Sept. 26 and Oct.

3. This course will dive deeper into home hardening, defensible spaces and fire-resistant landscaping.

For more information and where to sign up, visit Cabrillo College Extension Registration at cabrillo.augusoft.net/.

Justin White is the CEO of K& D Landscaping, headquartered in Watsonville, CA and awarded "2020 Business of the Year" by the Pajaro Valley Chamber of Commerce. White is also the current President of the California Landscape Contractors Association (CLCA) local chapter on the central coast. He is involved with several, non-profit organizations throughout the community and sits on the board of the Santa Cruz Business Council.

For more information on landscaping, outdoor and garden needs, contact K& D Landscaping at kndlandscaping.com.

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