

Firescaping

Defensible Space

Defensible space

Reducing fuels and creating “defensible space” in a 100 foot perimeter around your home is not just a good idea – it’s also the law for those who live in areas of California where there is no official fire department, also referred to as the State Responsibility Area.

A state law went into effect in 2005 which extended defensible space from 30 feet to 100 feet, according to CAL FIRE’s website. Creating defensible space is a proactive way to ensure your home can better endure fire and will have a better chance at remaining standing in an emergency fire event.

Defensible space is “a buffer you create between a building on your property and the grass, trees, shrubs, or any wildland area that surrounds it,” according to the website.

“This space is needed to slow or stop the spread of wildfire and it protects your home from catching fire – either from direct flame contact or radiant heat. Defensible space is also important for the protection of firefighters defending your home.”

There are two zones involved with defensible space, according to CAL FIRE. Zone 1 extends 30 feet from all buildings and structures and decks. Homeowners should remove all dead plants, grass and weeds from this area, as well as dead or dry leaves and pine needles from your yard, roof, and rain gutters. Trees should be trimmed regularly to keep branches a minimum of 10 feet from other trees.

Remove branches that hang over your roof and keep dead branches at least 10 feet from the chimney. Wood piles should be moved to Zone 2, and homeowners should

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remove or prune flammable plants and shrubs near windows and decks. Also in Zone 1, homeowners should create a separation between trees, shrubs and items that could catch fire, such as patio furniture, wood piles, swing sets, etc.

Zone 2 extends 100 feet from the home and other structures. In this area, cut or mow annual grass down to a maximum of four inches. Create spacing between shrubs and trees, and be sure to remove fallen leaves, needles, twigs, bark, cones and small branches to a depth of three inches or less.

Vertical spacing is also important, and all tree branches should be removed that are less than six feet from the ground.

Fire safe landscaping

Defensible space also calls for “fire-safe landscaping,” which isn’t necessarily the same thing as a well-maintained yard, CAL FIRE points out. It means using fire-resistant plants which are strategically placed to resist the spread of fire to your home.

You don’t need to have a ring of bare dirt around your home to accomplish fire safety, according to the University of California’s Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources. “Through proper planning, you can have both a beautiful landscape and a firesafe home... the general concept is that trees should be kept furthest from your house, shrubs can be closer, and bedding plants and lawns may be nearest the house.”

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Although all plants can burn given certain conditions, there are some plants which are less likely to ignite, according to the Division of Agriculture and Resources on their website, firecenter.berkeley.edu.

“In general, select plants that are low growing, open structured, and less resinous,” the website states.

Local nurseries can point you in the direction of fire-resistant plants, some of which include french lavender, red monkey flowers, California fuchsia, sage, California lilacs, society garlic and ornamental strawberry.

Instead of using mulches, noncombustible materials such as masonry, gravel, or stone walls will improve the fire resistance of your landscape, the fire center website states.