



Tuolumne County Fire Safe Landscaping

Tuolumne County is home to some of the most scenic vistas in the world. The natural beauty and climate have attracted us to settle here. Living in the mountains, however, means living with fire because our scenic vistas are fire dependent—fire cracks seed casings allowing our native plants to thrive and clears out dead brush that can choke living plants and cut off food for wildlife. So why are today's fires so devastating? The answer is in our backyards.

Your Best Defense Against Fire is a Fire Safe Landscape

Firefighters agree it is not if, but when, fire will burn through an area. There are not enough fire engines to protect every house. Firefighters need your help to give your home a fighting chance. The single most important feature that will give your home a chance is a fire safe landscape. A fire safe landscape may not be the same thing as a well-manicured yard. A fire safe landscape uses fire resistant plants that are strategically placed to resist the spread of fire. You may find that a fire safe landscape increases your property value and conserves water.

Defensible Space is the space around your home that will give firefighters a chance against a wildland fire. It means clearing all dry grass, brush, and dead leaves for at least 30 feet from your home and at least 150 feet if you are on a hill. (Contact the Tuolumne County Fire Department/Cal Fire for requirements in your area.) Defensible space and a fire safe landscape do not mean a ring of bare dirt around your home. When establishing your landscape, keep trees farthest from your house, shrubs closer, and bedding plants and lawns nearest the house.

Your home may be the biggest investment you ever make. Protect that investment by following the steps below to create a fire safe landscape.

Planning

- Assess your fire risk. Is your home on a hill? Are you near highly flammable native vegetation or drought damaged ornamental plants? If yes, your fire risk is greater than average.

- Plan your landscape to reduce the amount of flammable vegetation nearest your home.
- Establish defensible space.
- Consider consulting a local nursery or landscape contractor to help you.

Spacing

- Eliminate the “fire ladder.” You can sap fire of fuel by robbing it of the continuous sequence of vegetation that can carry flames from your landscape to your home.
- Group plants of similar height and water requirements to create a landscape mosaic that can slow the spread of fire to your house.
- Space trees at least 10 feet apart, and keep branches trimmed at least 10 feet from your roof. For trees taller than 18 feet, prune lower branches within 6 feet of the ground.
- Install fire resistant, drought tolerant plants that have a high moisture content.
- Use masonry or stonewalls to separate plant groups and add variety to your landscape.

Watering

- Choose the right irrigation system. All plants will eventually burn, but healthy plants burn less quickly.
- Consider drip irrigation for watering most of your landscape.
- Use sprinklers for lawns or turf landscaping. Drip irrigation does not work well on lawns. Sprinklers on timers can ensure your lawn is getting the right amount of water to keep it fire resistant.

Maintenance

- Keep your landscape healthy and clean. Remove dead branches, leaves, and pine needles that can serve as fuel to a fire.
- Prune and thin shrubs, trees, and other plants to minimize the fuel load. Remove dead leaves from under plants as well.
- If a gardener cares for your property, ask him or her to include these regular maintenance steps as part of their routine service.
- Recycle/compost plant materials.