

Ask a UC Master Gardener



**Landscaping Tips to
Help Defend Your Home
from Wildfire**

Climate: Mediterranean

Nevada County



- 5 Major world Mediterranean-climate regions
- 32° - 41° Latitude N or S
- Many special distinctions among world's landscapes
- Most fire prone areas of world



FireWise Landscaping Works



Homeowner pre-fire activities

- Green well-maintained landscape
- Fire resistant roof
- Reduction of wildland vegetation around property perimeter
- Good access road with turnaround area.

4 Steps to Firewise Landscaping

1. Observe
2. Design
3. Select
4. Maintain



FireWise Landscaping

- “Strategic placement of plants around perimeter of your home
- Creating and maintaining a fire break that includes fire-resistant plants that can reduce and block intense heat.”

Cal Fire

***In the event of a wildfire,
effectively managing the way you landscape,
can protect your home***



Fire Wise Landscaping

Primary goal: Fuel Reduction

- Limiting, managing amount of flammable vegetation or materials near your home
- Proper plant selection, arrangement & spacing

Firewise landscaping integrates traditional landscape functions into a design that reduces the wildfire threat by incorporating defensible space guidelines



Most Conifers

- Woody evergreens that bear cones and year round needlelike or scale like leaves



- Softwood
- Supply resins and turpentine
- Examples: juniper, cedars, pine
- Campfire starts with softwood



Avoid Woody Conifers Close to Structures



Ladder Fuel with Conifer Needle Drape

Eliminate
Ladders
to Avoid
Crown
Fires



4 Steps to Firewise Landscaping

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Defensible Space



Create Defensible Space

“Lean, Clean & Green”

Lean by pruning/trimming shrubs & cutting back tree branches to avoid fire-spread

Clean by removing combustible materials, needles, leaves, dead twigs, dry grasses

Green by planting, maintaining healthy fire-resistant vegetation within 30 feet of the home... especially during fire season

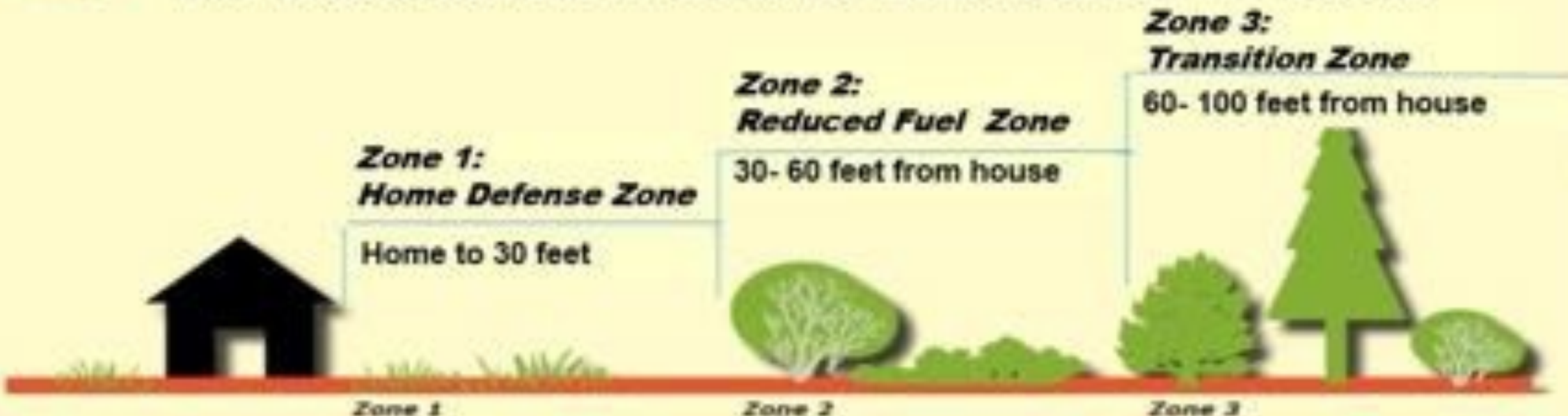
Most intensive vegetation management to resist ignition lies within Home Defense Zone





Design your Landscape to Defend Your Home

Your landscape can be attractive, low maintenance and fire resistant



STRATEGY	Fire Resistant Plants Only	Reduce Plant Density	Thin & Prune Existing Plants
Plant Choices	Oasis, low growing, fire resistant plants. Lawn. Avoid conifers or oily plants.	Low growing fire resistant plants and shrubs. Minimize use of conifers or oil rich plants	Keep most existing plants. Conifers okay. No oily plants under conifers.
Spacing	No foundation plantings. Stone patio, gravel mulch, pavers to 5'. Occasional, well spaced plants to minimize fuel.	Space trees and shrubs 2x their height	Space 10 feet apart to reduce fuel ladders that create crown fires.
Maintenance	Well pruned. Remove dead plants. Mow or weed-eat grasses. Well irrigated	Reduce volume of surface vegetation by cutting down tall grasses & pruning trees and shrubs	Prune overhanging branches and tree limbs 6-10 feet high.

Consider Slope

Fire travels faster uphill so increase distances



Trees or Tree Clumps		Shrubs or Shrub Patches	
Hill slope	Space between trees	Hill slope	Space between shrubs
0% to 20% slope	10 feet	0% to 20% slope	2 times shrub height
20% to 40% slope	20 feet	20% to 40% slope	4 times shrub height
40% or greater slope	30 feet	40% or greater slope	6 times shrub height

Plant Placement & Spacing

Where and How more important than
What

1. Replace flammable vegetation with fire-resistant varieties
2. Place smaller plants nearest house
3. Shrubs, taller trees furthest from house
4. Create small plant groupings, islands, patches, clusters
5. Stagger plants - Avoid 'rows' of plants
6. Maintain & horizontal vertical clearances

Keep it Simple!



Inner Home Defense 0-5' Hardscaped Firebreaks

Walkways -Rocks – Gravel – Brick

Patios - Stone walls

***Walkways that surround
planting areas
provide an effective barrier
to fire spread***



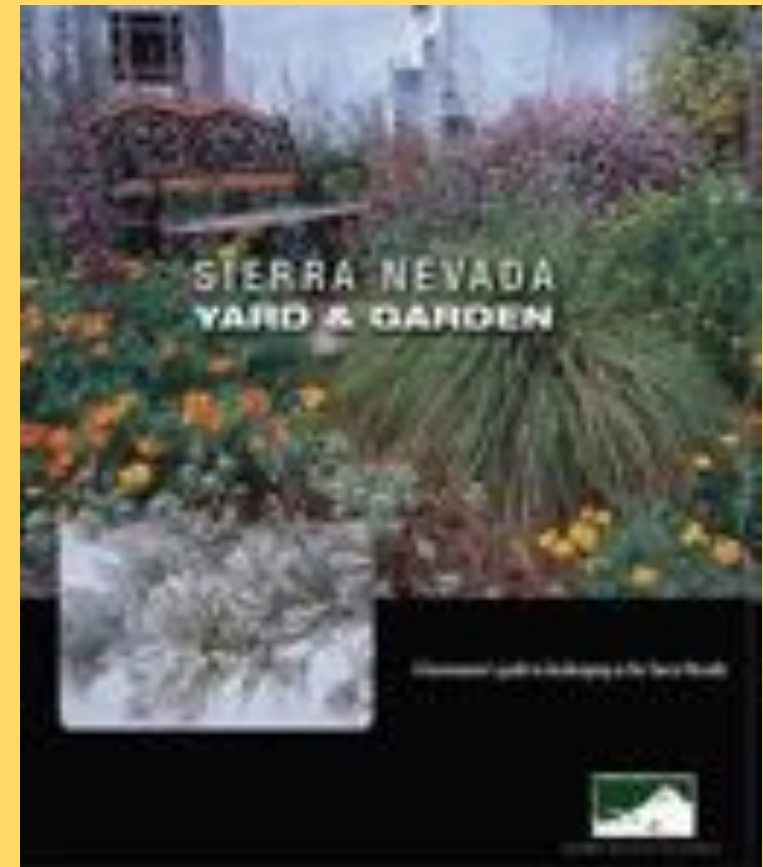
Hardscape: Rocks, Water and Oasis Effect





Oasis Resources

Sierra Nevada Yard and Garden
Sierra Nevada Alliance





Sierra Nevada Yard & Garden Guide

As wildfires rage across California, the Sierra Nevada Alliance offers a first of its kind guide to homeowners for creating a beautiful Sierra friendly yard and garden that:

- Guards against wildfire
- Is easy to care for and meets a family's goals
- Exists in harmony with wildlife
- Uses low maintenance, native plants
- Protects and conserves community drinking water.

Sierra Nevada Yard & Garden is one stop shopping – defend your home from wildfire, protect water quality, create a low maintenance yard and more. The guide shows homeowners how to get beautiful gardens and yards that don't require fuss for folks in the Sierra foothills, Eastern Sierra, and high country. The full color 157 page guide uses an innovative zone and island approach to fire safe designs and takes homeowners through a step-wise process: observe, design, select, and implement, making Sierra friendly yards simple and easy to create. The guide also includes chapters and appendices focused on plant selection, how-to, and yard and garden resources by sub-regions of the Sierra. The guide is filled with real-life features of Sierra homeowners gardening from 900 feet to 6 200 feet in elevation.

Mulch

Important in Western Landscapes

- Reduce water requirements of plants
- Cool soil temperatures
- Reduce weeds
- Control soil erosion and dust
- Prevent soil compaction
- Visually enhance landscape
- Healthy soil microbes = healthy plants

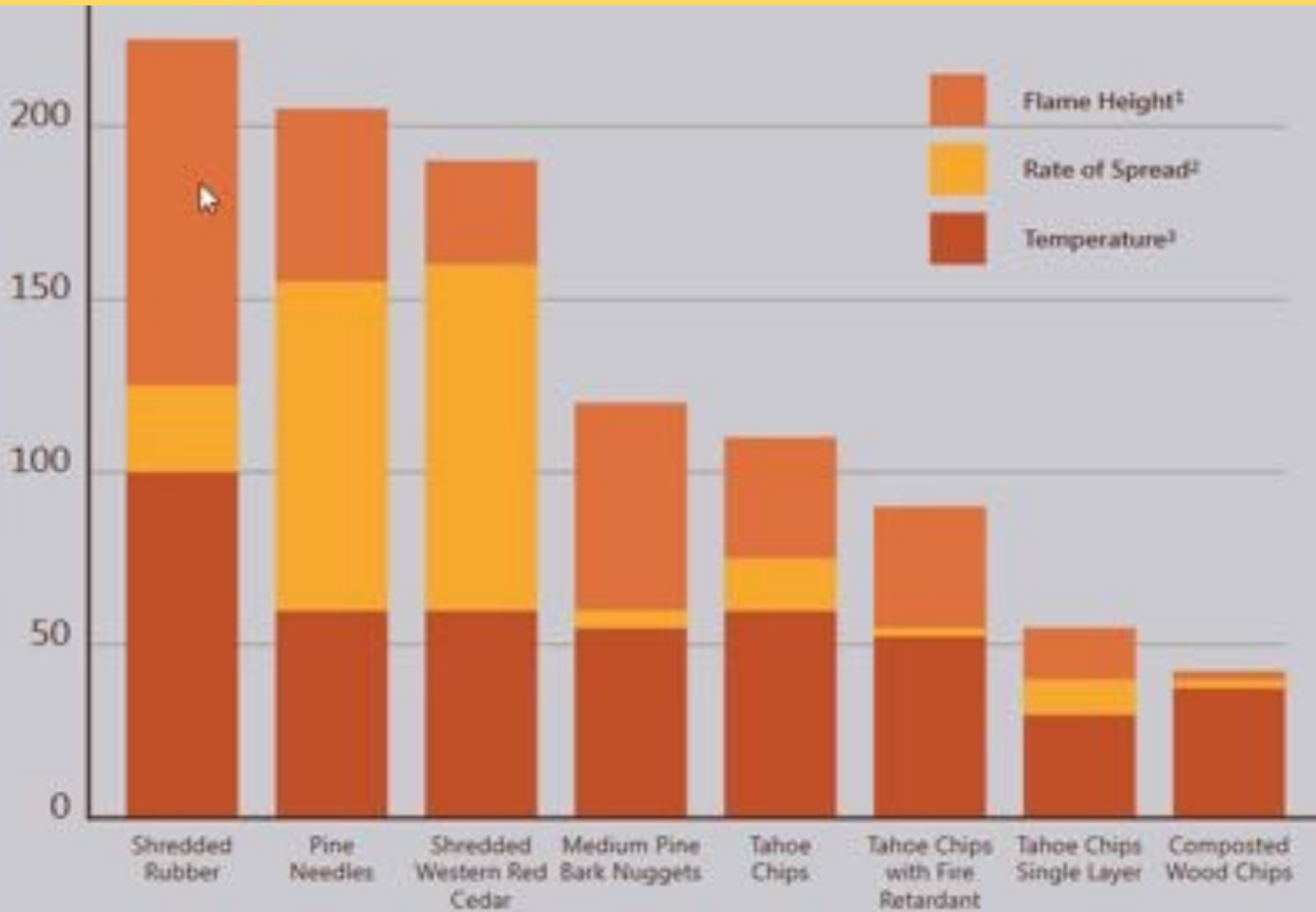


Mulch

- Embers from oncoming wildfire ignited pine bark nugget mulch in flowerbed.
- Burning mulch ignited landscape timbers, scorched adjacent lawn.
- Fortunately, house was separated from mulch by lawn and concrete sidewalk.



Relative Values by Combustion Characteristics



Mulch

The Combustibility of Landscape Mulches



Most Hazardous Fire Behavior

Shredded Western Red Cedar

Greatest Flame Height & Temperature

Rubber Mulch*

Most Easily Ignited/Fastest Spread Rate

Shredded W. Red Cedar/Pine Needles

**Incidental Flaming only
with some smoldering**

Composted Wood Chips

Least Hazardous Fire Behavior

Composted Wood Chips, single layer

Use Stone instead of Mulch near Foundation



Succulents: sedums, hens and chicks

Can be used in landscape to interrupt fire pathways.



4 Steps to Firewise Landscaping

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2. Design
3. **Select**
4. Maintain



FireWise Plant Choices

Terms Matter

- Don't use terms Firesafe or Fireproof
- All plants will burn under extreme intense conditions

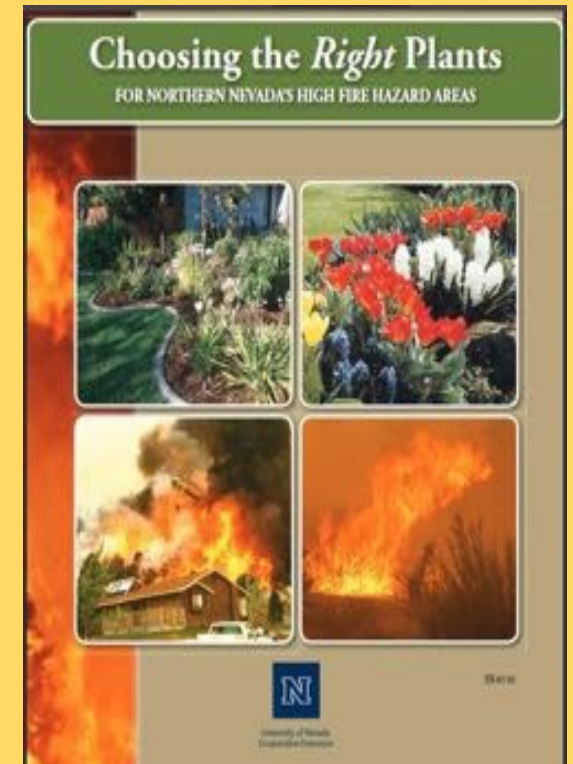
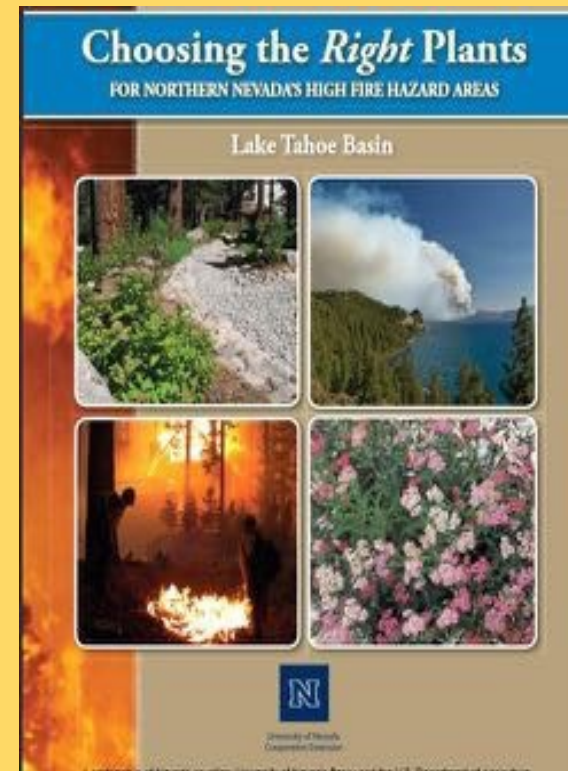
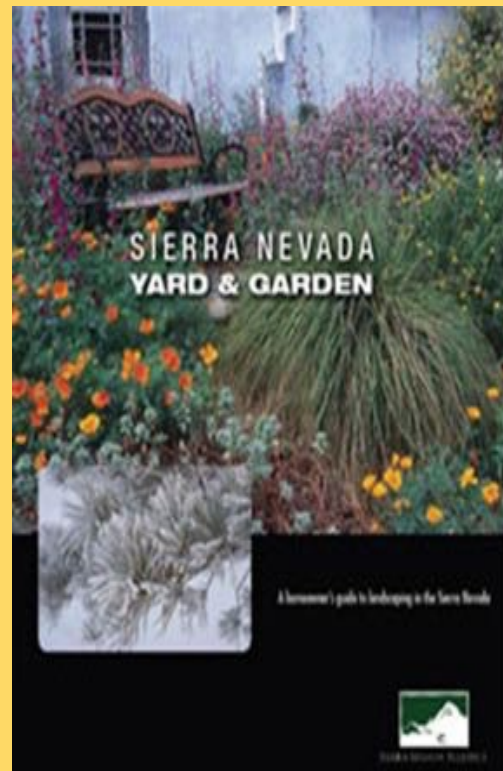
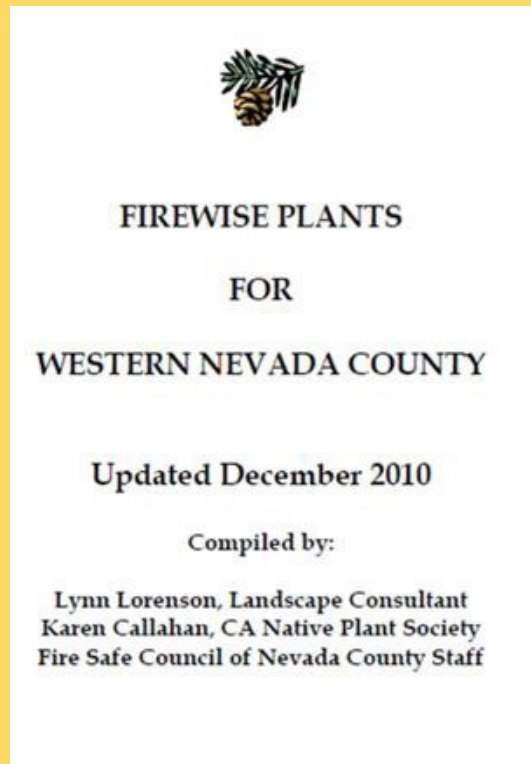
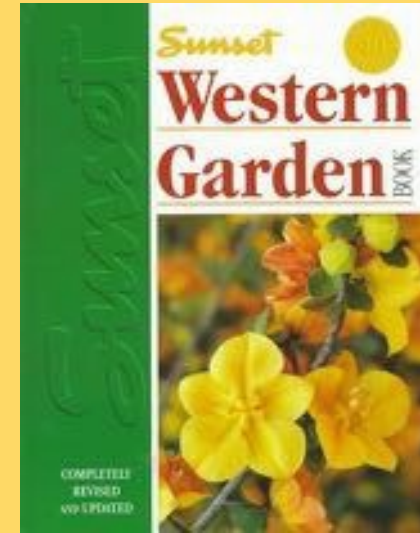
“Firewise plants”

- Less likely to burn
- May burn less hot or for less time
- May imply low maintenance, slow growth



Do Your Research

- Selecting the right plant requires some research
- Use reliable Firewise Plant List
- Check plant guides for plant characteristics



9 Firewise Plant Characteristics

Look for one or more traits:

1. Thick, moist, supple leaves in summer
2. Low fuel volume, low litter
3. Little or no sap, oil or resin content, no odor
4. Slow growth rate
5. Low-growing/compact, grows up to 18" in height
6. Smooth bark: *rough bark burns faster*
7. Deciduous: *leaves have higher moisture content*
8. Drought tolerant
9. Natives: *adapted to drought, take longer to ignite*



***Dwarf Mahonia**
Berberis aquifolium var. *repens*



Firethorn pyracantha
Pyracantha coccinea



***Oregon Ash**
Fraxinus latifolia



***Oregon Grape**
Mahonia aquifolium

Fire-Resistant plants...*not fire-proof!*

Factors that determine flammability:

1. How quickly its parts burn: *how much moisture content*
2. Overall plant form: *influences how hot plant burns*



*Native plants



*Evergreen Currant
Ribes viburnifolium

Fire-Resistant plants...*not fire-proof!*

Naturally-occurring plant differences:

1. High moisture content =
slower to ignite, absorbs heat
2. Natural drought resistance =
plants retain moisture, take longer to ignite



***California Wood Fern**
Dryopteris arguta

Fire-Resistant plants...*not fire-proof!*

More naturally-occurring plant differences:

3. Open, loosely branched plants
can trap burning embers,
absorb more heat w/o burning
slower flame spread



***Madrone**
Arbutus menziesii

Groundcovers



*Ajuga
Reptans



Lamium
maculatum



Euphorbias



*CA Creeping Sage
Salvia sonomensis



*Manzanita
Arctostaphylos uva ursi



Candytuft
Iberis sempervirens



Mountain Yarrow
Achillea millefolium lanulosa



Hardy Sedums



Stachys byzantina
'Helen von Stein'



UC Verde' Buffalo Grass
Buchloe dactyloides

Trees and Shrubs



Strawberry Tree
Arbutus unedo



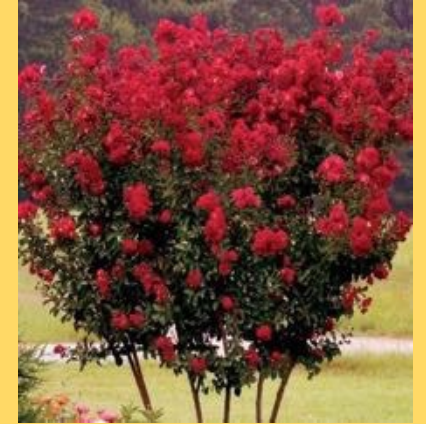
***Western Redbud**
Cercis occidentalis



***Western Dogwood**
Cornus Nuttallii



Flowering Pear
Pyrus calleryana



Crape Myrtle
Lagerstroemia indica



***California Lilac**
Ceanothus griseus horizontalis



***Tree Anemone**
Carpenteria californica



*** California Fuchsia**
Epilobium canum



Pineapple guava
Feijoa sellowiana



***Mtn Cream Bush**
Holodiscus discolor



- Healthy plants will always be more fire-resistant than struggling plants!
- Ignoring this guideline leads to
 - increased maintenance
 - failure of plants to thrive
 - Death
- Natives must be in right place

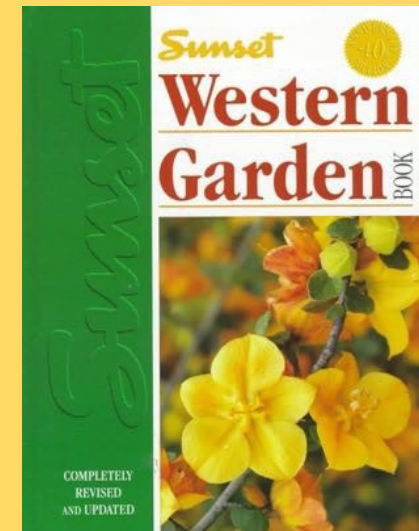
“Right Plant in Right Place”

- Mature height and width of plants
- In addition to their ornamental value, select plants to match eco-niche growing conditions
 1. Hardiness
 2. Sun needs
 3. Moisture needs



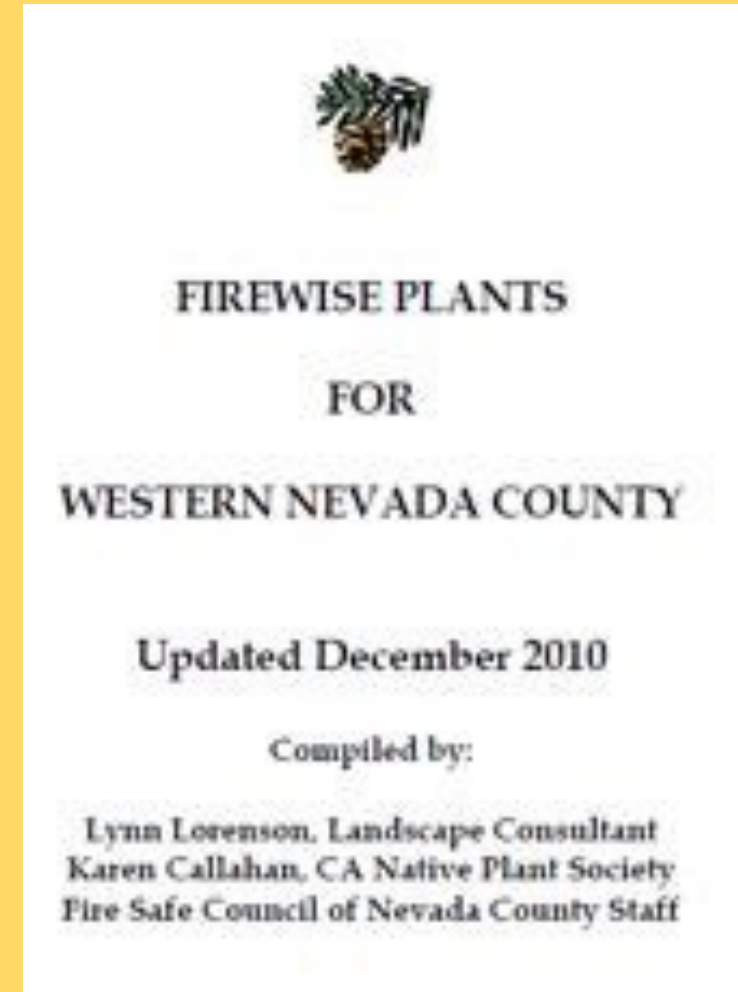
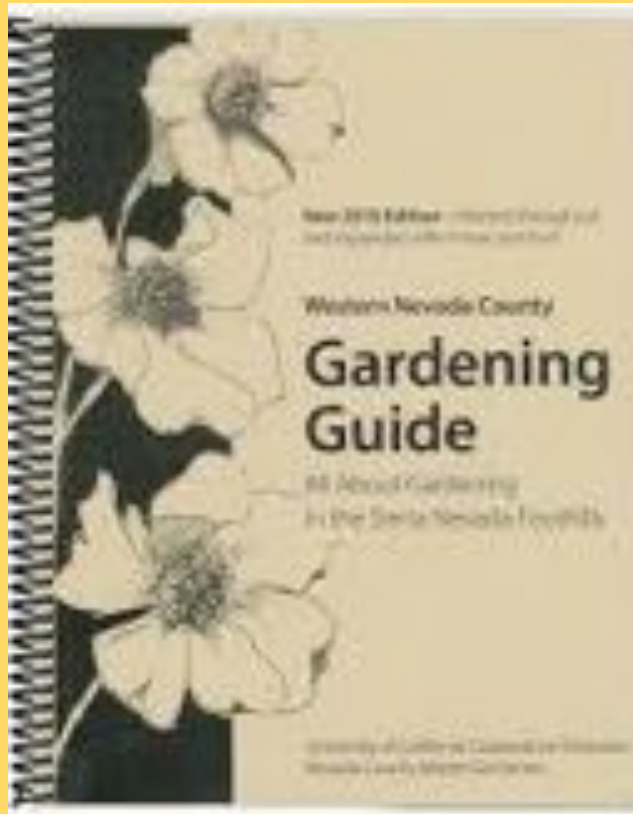
Adaptation to Climate – Mediterranean

1. USDA Hardiness Zone Map by zip code NV CO: Zone 1 coldest; zone 9 warmest.
2. Sunset Gardening Zone Map – Generalized warm and cold climate



Firewise Plants

“Reliable Plant List”



Nevada County Master Gardener's
Western Nevada County Gardening Guide

Firewise Plants p. 3

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Sun and Water Needs

Plants for
Sun/ Dry Conditions
Sun/ Water Conditions
Shade/ Dry Conditions
Shade/ Water Conditions



FIREWISE PLANTS FOR WESTERN NEVADA COUNTY

Updated December 2010

Compiled by:

Lynn Lorensen, Landscape Consultant
Karen Callahan, CA Native Plant Society
Fire Safe Council of Nevada County Staff

Firewise Plants



FIREWISE PLANTS

FOR

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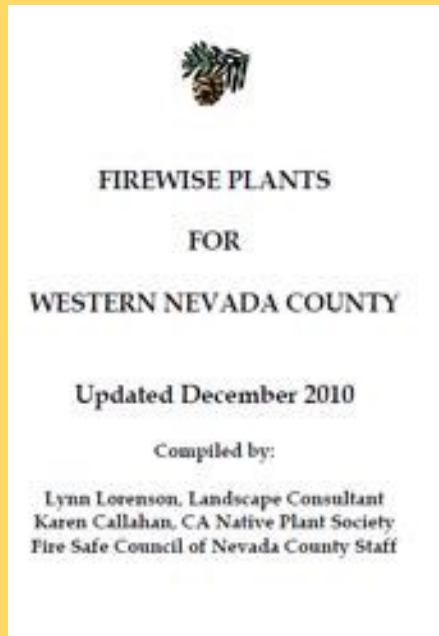
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EXTREMELY COMBUSTIBLE PLANT MATERIAL

Characteristics of plants not recommended for high fire areas:
(most of Nevada County is designated a High Severity Fire Zone)

High surface area to volume ratio

Low moisture content

High percentage of dead matter or debris

Plants designated  ***are extremely combustible.*** These plants should be avoided or used with great caution as to the proximity to structures or surrounding plants. Others on this list should only be used with proper maintenance & clearing.



CALIFORNIA NATIVE & NON-NATIVE TREES

(It is recommended to 'limb-up' 10 feet above the ground)

Fir
Cedar
Cypress, Cedar
Cypress
Larch
Spruce
Pine
Arborvitae
Hemlock


Abies spp.
Cedrus spp.
Chamaecyparis spp. (except dwarf)
Cupressus spp.
Larix
Picea spp.
Pinus spp. (including dwarf)
Thuja spp.
Tsuga spp.





Not So Firewise Plants p. 22/23/24



 **Extremely Combustible**

CALIFORNIA NATIVE & NON-NATIVE SHRUBS

( avoid use or use only with proper clearing & maintenance)

 Chamise, Greasewood	<i>Adenostoma fasciculatum</i>
 Red Shanks	<i>Adenostoma sparsifolium</i>
California Sagebrush	<i>Artemisia californica</i>
Hopseed Bush	<i>Dodonaea viscosa</i>
Buckwheat	<i>Eriogonum spp.</i>
 Juniper	<i>Juniperus spp.</i>
 Chaparral Pea	






CALIFORNIA NATIVE & NON-NATIVE GROUNDCOVERS

( avoid using near structures or other shrubs & trees)

 Coyote Bush	<i>Baccharis spp.</i>
 Algerian Ivy	<i>Hedera Canariensis/helix</i> (Invasive!)
 Juniper	<i>Juniper spp.</i>

CALIFORNIA NATIVE & NON-NATIVE GRASSES, PERENNIALS & VINES

( avoid using these extremely combustible plants)

 Bamboo	<i>Bamboo spp.</i>	
 Pampas Grass		<i>Cortaderia selloana</i>
 Japanese Honeysuckle		<i>Lonicera japonica</i>
Eulalia Grass		<i>Miscanthus</i>
Deer Grass		<i>Muhlenbergia spp.</i>
 Fountain Grass		<i>Pennisetum setaceum</i>
 Black Sage		<i>Salvia mellifera</i>

Firefighters Call These Gasoline Plants



<i>Artemisia</i> species	Sage or Wormwood
<i>Calamagrostis acutiflora</i>	Feather Reed Grass
<i>Calocedrus decurrens</i>	Incense Cedar
<i>Cedrus atlantica 'Glauca'</i>	Blue Atlas Cedar
<i>Oryzanthus natans</i>	Rubber Rabbitbrush
<i>Cupressus glabra</i>	Arizona Cypress
<i>Cytisus</i> species	Broom
<i>Genista</i> species	Dwarf Broom
<i>Juniperus</i> species	Juniper
<i>Picea glauca 'Conica'</i>	Dwarf Alberta Spruce
<i>Picea pungens</i>	Spruce
<i>Pinus</i> species	Pine
<i>Sequoia gigantea</i>	Giant Redwood
<i>Thuja occidentalis</i>	Arborvitae

Gasoline Plants

Keep these bad boys out of Zones 0, 1 & 2!

9 Common characteristics:

1. Leaves typically resinous, oily, waxy; wood usually contains volatile oils or terpenes, *e.g. rosemary, eucalyptus*
2. Leaves typically stiff, leathery, small or fine, lacy
3. Sap is gummy, resinous and/or has a strong odor
4. Loose or papery bark, *e.g., Birch trees*
5. Dense plant structure; can trap fine, dry or dead materials
6. Can be blade-leaf or needle-leaf woody evergreens
7. Any shrub with excessive dead wood
8. Dying or dead brush
9. Plants that flame when preheated/ignited by match



Scotch Broom



Juniper



Bamboo



Pampas Grass



Mountain Misery



Rosemary

Gasoline Plants

1. **Most conifers:** Fir, Cedar, Cypress, Larch, Spruce, Pine
2. **Shrubs:** Chamise/Greasewood, Calif Sagebrush, Hopseed Bush, Red Shanks, Buckwheat, Juniper, Chaparral Pea
3. **Groundcovers:** Juniper, Coyote Bush
4. Any shrub or tree with excessive dead wood



Spruce



Juniper



Coyote Bush

4 Steps to Firewise Landscaping

1. Observe
2. Design
3. Select
4. **Maintain**



Fire Resistant Plants

Can be fire hazards if neglected:

- Irrigation: even drought-tolerant plants may need some summer watering to retain fire resistance
- Do not let debris accumulate
- Essential:
 - Raking
 - Regular thinning
 - Pruning
 - Weed eating or mowing
- ***Landscape design & maintenance more important than plant species for fire-resistant defensible space***



*Flannel bush
Fremontodendron

Maintenance

**POORLY MAINTAINED
LANDSCAPE**



**WELL MAINTAINED
LANDSCAPE**





Need Help?

Take action now, put together *your* plan

Gardening Questions:

Nevada County Master Gardeners

Hotline: (530) 273-0919

Office: 255 So. Auburn St.

Grass Valley, CA 95945

Office hours:

Tues & Thurs 9 am to 12 noon

www.ncmg.ucanr.org



Defensible Space Questions:

Fire Safe Council of Nevada County

Phone: (530) 272-1122

www.areyoufiresafe.com



Master Gardener Slideshow



- This slideshow was put together by Master Gardener Cathe' Fish based on a slideshow developed by Master Gardener Stephanie Wagner. Thanks, Cathe' and Stephanie
- Visit Nevada County Master Gardener's website ncmg.ucanr.org/
- Facebook [UCCE Master Gardeners of Nevada County](#)
- MASTER GARDENER HOTLINE OFFICE: 530-273-0919
- Office: 255 South Auburn Street, Grass Valley - in Veterans Memorial Building
- Demonstration Garden: 1036 W. Main Street, Grass Valley, (on the NID grounds) offers a wonderful variety of plant venues, including an orchard and oak habitat

Defensible Space Questions?

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Grass Valley, CA 95945