

Garden Talk

Resistant Plants & Firewise Safety

“Where People Who Love to Garden, Love to Shop”

Getting back-to-nature, seeking solitude, escaping the rat race are all good reasons to live near the forest. Locally we call this the urban-wildland interface. The vistas are spectacular, community surrounded by mature juniper, pine, and native manzanita. This interface is natural for all kinds of local animals, from deer and javelina to rabbits, coyotes, and lynx. One of the primary hazards is wildfire. You can have a beautiful landscape that is animal resistant and be firewise with a little clean-up and defensible space.

Defensible Space - The top priority outdoors is creating a dependable space. This area serves as a buffer zone as a fire approaches your home. The goal is to keep a fire moving slow and low until extinguished. Some plants are more flammable than others, and if we thin these varieties closest to the house, it keeps fire close to the ground and moving slow. Firefighters enjoy defending homes with this defensible space maintained.

Evergreen conifers are high in combustible resins and waxes that make them evergreen and durable, except in the case of fire. Close to the house, you should reduce the number of juniper, pine, spruce, and cedars. Each is high in plant resins and burn easily. Replace them with deciduous plants or those that lose their leaves in winter. Deciduous plants not only hold more water in their foliage, which makes them more difficult to burn, but they drop their foliage during the winter months and reduce combustible materials in the landscape when leaves are picked up in winter.

Think camping for a moment. Throw a freshly picked pine branch on the campfire, and it ignites easily with a whole lot of smoke. Throw a leafy oak branch, ash, or cottonwood on the same campfire, and it is likely to smolder and wither. These moist deciduous plants only catch blaze after the hydrating life has been sucked from the limbs. These are the branches that never finished burning and still there the next morning.

Characteristics of a firewise plant are fivefold

1. **Supple leaves**
2. **Water like sap**
3. **Thicker bark**
4. **High moisture content**
5. **Low resin content**

Water and feed the landscape to keep healthy. Water your existing natives once per month in summer until the monsoons arrive. Ornamental landscape plants appreciate a deep soak once per week. A composted mulch layer helps suppress weeds and holds moisture around healthy plants, especially helpful through summer.

Avoid ladder fuels. This is where tall weeds ignite a taller shrub that catches the pine trees on fire, then jumps to the roof. Remember, our goal with a firewise landscape is to keep a fire on the ground, out of the canopies, and off the roof. Ideally, design garden islands in the yard with an interesting plant mix separated from the next garden island by a driveway, patio, or rock lawn. This firewise technique allows firefighters some space between gardens to fight the flames.

Clean debris from gutters and roof. Needles and leaves on the roof and gutters provide a tinder for blowing sparks. Chip piles of brush and use as compost or remove it for disposal.

Firewise Plants catch fire slowly, and when they burn, they ignite with less intensity and burn cooler. Perennial flowers that go dormant and hibernate underground in winter are considered firewise. Focus most firewise resources on your trees and shrubs. These are the plants that provide the most burnable material in the landscape. We defiantly want these plants to be firewise, especially within the home's first 30' feet.



Animals eating your freshly planted landscape actually a more difficult subject. Walk the rolling hills, and you will find plants that stand out in the neighborhood. If the animals leave a neighbor's plants alone, there's a good chance your yard will be the same. Knock on the door to find out what's growing in their yard. Gardeners love sharing insider tips on their plants and freely share successes. Take a picture and bring them to Watters Garden Center for professional identification. Top Plants from the preferred plant list that are both

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Deer & Javelina Resistant

Evergreen Trees

Arizona Cypress
Austrian Pine
Colorado Spruce
Deodar Cedar
Juniper (Spartan, Wichita Blue, Hollywood, etc.)
Oregon Green Pine
Pinion Pine
Ponderosa Pine
Vanderwolf Pine

Deciduous Trees & Firewise

Aspen
Birch
Locust (Purple Robe, Honey & Green)
Maple
Oaks
Serviceberry

Spring Blooming & Firewise

Ornamental Pear
Purple Leaf Plum
Redbud

Evergreen Shrubs & Firewise

Artemesia
Boxwood
Cotoneaster (all types from groundcover to upright)
Gopher Plant
Nandina (Heavenly Bamboo, Gulf Stream, Sienna Sunrise)
Oregon Grape Holly
Silverberry Eleagnus
Mugo Pine
Santolina
Spanish Broom
Scotch Broom

Evergreen but not as firewise

Bear Grass
Desert Spoon
Juniper (ground-hugging through upright)
Manzanita
Yew

Blooming Shrubs & Firewise

Abelia
Butterfly Bush
Crape Myrtle
False Spirea (Blue Beard)
Forsythia
Lilac
Salvia greggii
Spirea

Blooming Shrubs but not as firewise

Mediterranean Heath
Lavender
Rosemary
Rock Rose
Russian Sage

Native Plants

Emory Oak
Gamble Oak
Shrub Oak
Snakeweed
Sumac

Native Plants but not as firewise

Apache Plume
Bear Grass
Cliff Rose
Rabbitbrush
Manzanita
Mountain Mahogany
Silk tassel

Flowers, Grasses & Firewise

Blackfoot Daisy

Blue Flax
Catmint
Coneflower
Daylily
Gaillardia
Iris
Red Hot Poker
Penstemon
Snapdragon
Vinca

Flowers, Grasses not as firewise

Deer Grass
Gramma Grass
Heather
Lantana
Muhly Grass
Sandpaper Verbena



Herbs & Firewise

Basil
Mint
Oregano
Thyme
Sage

Herbs & Firewise not as Firewise

Lavender
Rosemary

Vines & Firewise

Boston Ivy
Honeysuckle
Ivy
Virginia Creeper