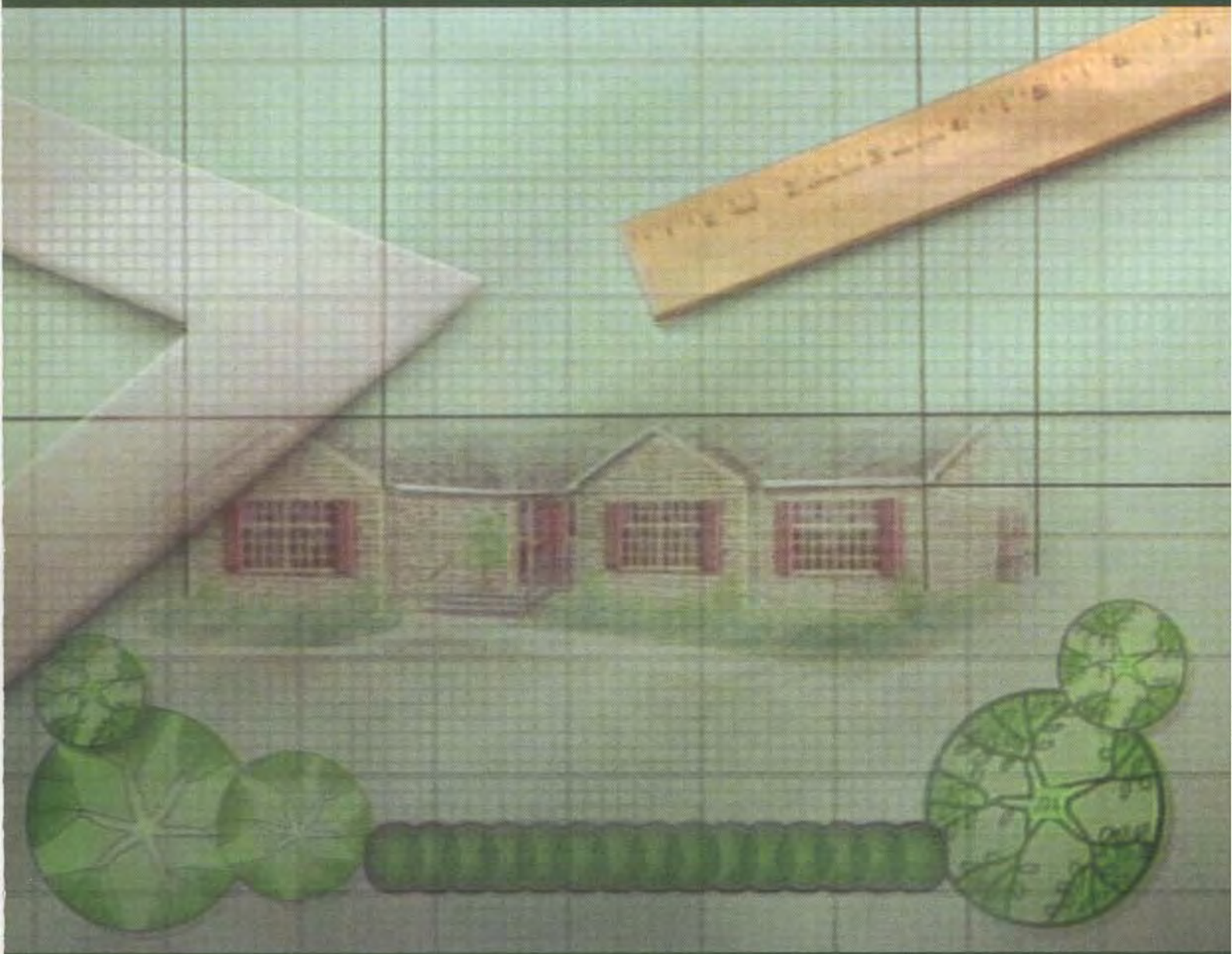
Firewise Guide to Landscape and Construction



FIREWISE COMMUNITIES www.firewise.org

Guide to Landscaping

The primary goal for Firewise landscaping is fuel reduction — limiting the level of flammable vegetation and materials surrounding the home and increasing the moisture content of remaining vegetation. This includes the entire 'home ignition zone' which extends up to 200 feet in high hazard areas.

Use the Zone Concept

Zone 1 is the 30 feet adjacent to the home and its attachments; Zone 2 is 30 to 100 feet from the home; Zone 3 is 100 to 200 feet from the home.

Use grass and driveways as fuel breaks from the house.

Zone 1 (All Hazard Areas) *This well-irrigated area encircles the structure and all its attachments (wooden decks, fences, and boardwalks) for at least 30 feet on all sides.*

1) Plants should be carefully spaced, low-growing and free of resins, oils and waxes that burn easily.
2) Mow the lawn regularly. Prune trees up six to ten feet from the ground.
3) Space conifer trees 30 feet between crowns. Trim back trees that overhang the house.
4) Create a 'fire-free' area within five feet of the home, using non-flammable landscaping materials and/or high-moisture-content annuals and perennials.
5) Remove dead vegetation from under deck and within 10 feet of house.
6) Consider fire-resistant material for patio furniture, swing sets, etc.
7) Firewood stacks and propane tanks should not be located in this zone.
8) Water plants, trees and mulch regularly.
9) Consider xeriscaping if you are affected by water-use restrictions.

Use faux brick and stone finishes and high-moisture-content annuals and perennials.

Zone 2 (Moderate and High Hazard Areas) Plants in this zone should be low-growing, well-irrigated, and less flammable.

1) Leave 30 feet between clusters of two to three trees, or 20 feet between individual trees.
2) Encourage a mixture of deciduous and coniferous trees.
3) Create 'fuel breaks', like driveways, gravel walkways and lawns.
4) Prune trees up six to ten feet from the ground.

Use groupings of potted plants that include succulents and other drought resistant vegetation.

Zone 3 (High Hazard Areas) Thin this area, although less space is required than in Zone 2. Remove smaller conifers that are growing between taller trees. Remove heavy accumulation of woody debris. Reduce the density of tall trees so canopies are not touching.

Maintaining the Firewise Landscape

- ✓Keep trees and shrubs pruned six to ten feet from the ground.
- ✓Remove leaf clutter and dead and overhanging branches.
- ✓Mow the lawn regularly and dispose of cutting and debris promptly.
- ✓Store firewood away from the house.
- ✓Maintain the irrigation system regularly.
- ✓Familiarize yourself with local regulations regarding vegetative clearance, debris disposal, and fire safety requirements for equipment.

Create a cinder block wall around the perimeter of your yard and use grass and slate to break up the landscape.

The use of pavers and rock make for a pleasing effect and creates a fuel break.

The roof is the most important element of the home. Use rated roofing material.

Cover openings with 1/8" metal screen to block firebrands and embers from collecting under the home or deck.

Use non-flammable fencing if attached to the house such as metal.

"When considering improvements to reduce wildfire vulnerability, the key is to consider the home in relation to its immediate surroundings. The home's vulnerability is determined by the exposure of its external materials and design to flames and firebrands during extreme wildfires. The higher the fire intensities near the home, the greater the need for nonflammable construction materials and a resistant building design." – Jack Cohen, USDA-Forest Service

Use Rated Roofing Material. Roofing material with a Class A, B or C rating is fire resistant and will help keep the flame from spreading. Examples:

- ✓ Composition shingle
- ✓ Metal
- ✓ Clay
- ✓ Cement tile

Use Fire-Resistant Building Materials on Exterior Walls. Examples include:

- ✓ Cement
- ✓ Plaster
- ✓ Stucco
- ✓ Masonry (concrete, stone, brick or block)

While vinyl is difficult to ignite, it can fall away or melt when exposed to extreme heat.

Use Double-Paned or Tempered Glass. Double-pane glass can help reduce the risk of fracture or collapse during an extreme wildfire. Tempered glass is the most effective. For skylights, glass is a better choice than plastic or fiberglass.

Enclose Eaves, Fascias, Soffits and Vents. 'Box' eaves, fascias, soffits and vents, or enclose them with metal screens. Vent openings should be covered with 1/8" metal screen.

Protect Overhangs and Other Attachments. Remove all vegetation and other fuels from around overhangs and other attachments (room additions, bay windows, decks, porches, carports and fences). Box in the undersides of overhangs, decks and balconies with noncombustible or fire-resistant materials. Fences constructed of flammable materials like wood should not be attached directly to the house.

Anything attached to the house (decks, porches, fences and outbuildings) should be considered part of the house. These act as fuel bridges, particularly if constructed from flammable materials.

1) If a wood fence is attached to the house, separate the fence from the house with a masonry or metal barrier.
2) Decks and elevated porches should be kept free of combustible materials and debris.
3) Elevated wooden decks should not be located at the top of a hill. Consider a terrace.

Use glass skylights; plastic will melt and allow embers into the home.

Enclose eaves and soffits.

Enclose under decks so firebrands do not fly under and collect.