



Minimizing Fire Risk in Wildlife-Friendly Gardens

Why is Wildfire Risk Worsening?

As summers become increasingly warmer and drier, the risk of wildfire increases, posing challenges to creating gardens that support wildlife. Fire season is currently 80 days longer than historic averages, leading scientists to declare us to be in the **'Age of the Megafire'**.

Fire is not inherently bad. Natural fire cycles are an ecological necessity for many habitats. However, historical mismanagement has suppressed small-scale natural blazes that are needed to burn away fallen woody debris and control excessive new growth. This has contributed to the rise of megafires in fire-prone forests.

Did you Know?

Climate change makes wildfires more severe. Our warming world has dried land and vegetation, making megafires more frequent and intense. Today over 60% of new housing is built in highly flammable regions.

Reducing Risk on Your Property

Making immediate changes to your gardening practices will greatly reduce the risk of fire on your property.

Prioritize the area 0-100 feet from your home, including your home's design and materials, vegetation, and structures such as decks, furniture, fences, and sheds.

- 1. Immediate Zone (0-5 ft. from home)** Harden the home with ignition-resistant siding, roofs, decks, attic vents, eaves, and windows. Remove vegetation and flammable mulch to create a five-foot buffer zone around the home. Clean gutters and roofs of debris. Remove all branches that overhang the structure. Avoid storing combustible materials on or under decks.
- 2. Intermediate Zone (5-30 ft. from home)** Follow the principle of “**Green, Clean, and Lean;**” make sure flammable material—such as dry grass, fallen trees, logs, and shrubs are alive and watered, trimmed back, and well-spaced. Space shrubs at least 2x's their height, increasing spacing depending on the incline of slopes. Remove all limbs within 10 feet of the ground from mature trees. Plant native plants that retain moisture and use water efficiently to decrease the combustibility of your space. Reduce or remove water-hungry vegetation, such as ornamental grass. Do not use combustible mulches, including pine needles, red cedar chips, or bark. Composted wood chips make one of the least combustible mulches. Replace wood fencing with metal fencing where it attaches to the home.
- 3. Extended Zone (30-100 ft. from home)** Space and prune trees and vegetation to keep flames smaller and lower to the ground. Provide a safe, open place for fire personnel to defend the home, and allow safe routes for evacuation.

Keeping Wildlife In Mind

Most fire-intolerant plants are non-native species that don't support wildlife and should be removed.

Replace with native plants to offer wildlife habitat. Native plants are also better adapted to the area's natural fire cycles.

Use region-specific guides for choosing fire-resistant native plants for your area.

Alternatives to Lawns

Lawns cover large swaths of land with flammable materials. Replacing lawns with well-spaced native, fire-resistant plants reduces the risk of fire and provides wildlife habitat.



Annual Plants

Annual plants provide flower nectar to pollinators in the spring and tend to die back before fire season.



Composted Wood Chips

Composted wood chips are less flammable than other types of mulch and can be used to fill garden beds. They provide a healthy, natural habitat for wildlife.



Rock Gardens, Ponds, and Other Water Sources

Water features reduce the flammability of your property and provide important breeding and feeding habitat for wildlife.

To Leave or Not to Leave?

Ideally, fallen leaves should be left on the ground, as they provide important habitat for thousands of species and act as natural mulch. However, in fire-prone areas, this can contribute to fuel load and fire risk adjacent to your home. Instead, rake the leaves away from structures and only use them as mulch in the extended zone. They can also be safely used as mulch in the intermediate zone if watered regularly.

State and Region-Specific Plant Guides

- [Pacific Northwest](#): Guide to fire-resistant garden plants.
- [California](#): List of native fire- and deer-resistant plants.
- [Northern Nevada](#): Choosing fire-resistant plants.
- [Oregon](#): Fire-resistant plants for home landscapes.
- [Eastern Washington](#): Fire-resistant plants.
- [Idaho](#): Master database of fire-resistance in plants.
- [Utah](#): Firewise plants for a landscape.
- [Montana](#): Fire-resistant plants for landscapes.
- [Wyoming](#): Fire-resistant vegetation list.
- [Colorado Foothills](#): Firewise landscape plants.



Additional Resources

[Why Wildfires Have Gotten Worse](#)

[Reducing Wildfire Risk to Your Home](#)

[Landscaping with Fire-smart Plants](#)

[Passing Wildlife-Friendly Property Maintenance Ordinances](#)

[Wildfire Home and Property Checklist](#)



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