Fire-Resistant Plants for Oregon Home Landscapes

Suggesting specific types of vegetation that may reduce your risk from wildfire.

Stephen Fitzgerald
Area Extension Forester
and Associate Professor
Amy Jo Waldo
Area Extension Horticulture Agent
and Assistant Professor

OSU Extension Service
1421 S. Hwy 97, Redmond, OR 97756
Introduction

Oregon has many wildfire prone areas.

In these places, fires are a natural part of the changing landscape. As homes are built in these areas, special precautions must be taken by the homeowner to protect their property. Installation of fire-resistant roofing is critical to preventing firebrands from igniting the home from a roof fire. Well maintained fire-resistant vegetation and irrigated landscape is also critical within close proximity of a home. These actions DO NOT insure that your home will survive a wildfire, but they provide for a good chance of structural survival. Implementation of FireFree [www.firefree.org] and FireWise [www.firewise.org] activities can also significantly improve chances of a home surviving a wildfire.

Fire-resistant vegetation.

When landscaping around a home, most homeowners are interested in creating a landscape that is aesthetically pleasing, compliments their home, and has variations in color, texture, flowers, and foliage. If your home is located in or adjacent to forests or rangeland, you should also consider the flammability of plants within your home landscape.

Flammable plant material in your landscape can increase the fire-risk around your home. The 1991 Oakland Hills Fire in California is a prime example of how flammable plant material (Eucalyptus trees) can act as fuel and contribute to the intensity of a wildfire. Over 3,000 homes were destroyed in that devastating wildfire.
Taking action.
Homeowners should take active steps to minimize or reduce the fuel and fire-hazard around their homes, including planting fire-resistant plants. Good placement and on-going maintenance of fire-resistant trees, for example, can, in fact, help protect your home by blocking intense heat.

Making choices.
There is a wide array of trees and other plants to choose for your landscape that are both attractive and fire-resistant. This publication provides a diverse list of plant material divided into perennials, groundcovers, trees, and shrubs.

Annuals.
Annuals can be part of a fire-resistant landscape if well watered and well maintained. We have not listed each of these due to the large number of annuals available to the homeowner.

Turf.
A well maintained lawn can be included in a fire-resistant landscape and serves well as an effective fuel break (See photo). For more information on lawn care and maintenance, check out available publications from your local OSU Extension Service.

A Caution About Bark Mulch.
Bark mulch is often used in home landscapes. However, fire brands from a wildfire and cigarettes can ignite dry bark mulch, conveying the fire to your home. If you landscape with bark mulch up against your home, make sure it remains moist to prevent ignition.
What are fire-resistant plants?

Fire-resistant plants are plants that don’t readily ignite from a flame or other ignition sources. Although fire-resistant plants can be damaged or even killed by fire, their foliage and stems don’t contribute significantly to the fuel and, therefore, the fire’s intensity.

Fire Resistant does not mean fire proof.

Plants that are fire-resistant have the following characteristics:

- Leaves are moist and supple.
- Plants have little dead wood and tend not to accumulate dry, dead material within the plant.
- Sap is water-like and does not have a strong odor.

Most deciduous trees and shrubs are fire-resistant. However, it’s important to remember that even fire-resistant plants can burn, particularly if they are not maintained in a healthy condition.
In contrast, plants that are highly flammable have these general characteristics:

- Contain fine, dry or dead material within the plant such as twigs, needles, and leaves.
- Leaves, twigs, and stems contain volatile waxes, terpenes, or oils.
- Leaves are aromatic (strong smell when crushed)
- Sap is gummy, resinous and has a strong odor.
- May have loose or papery bark.

Both ornamental and native plants can be highly flammable. An example of a highly flammable ornamental shrub often planted in home landscapes is ornamental juniper. Examples of highly flammable native shrubs include bitterbrush, manzanita, sagebrush, and ceanothus. **Avoid planting these plants around your home.**

-Adapted from University of California Cooperative Extension Hortscript, 1996, No. 18.
How this list was developed

This list was developed by evaluating fire-resistant plant lists developed for other regions and screening the scientific literature on plant flammability. Included in this list are plants adapted to grow in Oregon in either irrigated or non-irrigated landscapes. However, most of the plants on this list require some level of irrigation to survive during the dry summer months, particularly in central and eastern Oregon.

The plants in this publication are adaptable in all regions of Oregon unless otherwise marked with an identifying orange symbol. Plants marked with these symbols are suitable only for the regions specified.

**KEY:**

- **C** = Central Oregon
- **E** = Eastern Oregon
- **S** = Southern Oregon
- **W** = Western Oregon

*Before deciding on which plants to purchase for your yard, please check with your homeowners association landscape review committee.*

**Disclaimer**

The purpose of this document is to provide homeowners with guidance on ways to landscape their property with fire resistant vegetation to help reduce losses from wildfire damage. It contains suggestions and recommendations based on professional judgment, experience and research and is intended to serve only as a guide. The authors, contributors and publisher disclaim all warranties and guarantees with respect to the information in the document and assume no liability or responsibility with respect to the information.
Groundcovers

Ajuga reptans
Carpet Bugleweed

Delosperma cooperi
Purple/Pink Iceplant

Arctostaphylos uva-ursi
Kinnikinnick

Duchesnea indica
Mock Strawberry

Ceanothus prostratus
Squaw Carpet

Echeveria species
Hens and Chicks

Cerastium tomentosum
Snow-in-Summer

Fragaria species
Wild Strawberry

Delosperma nubigenum
Yellow Iceplant

Pachysandra terminalis
Japanese Pachysandra
Groundcovers

- *Phlox subulata*
  Creeping Phlox

- *Thymus praecox*
  Creeping Thyme

- *Sedum species*
  Sedum or Stonecrops

- *Vinca minor*
  Periwinkle

Perennials

- *Achillea species*
  Yarrow

- *Armeria maritima*
  Sea Thrift

- *Allium schoenoprasum*
  Chives

- *Aurinia saxatilis*
  Basket-of-Gold

*C* = Central Oregon  
*E* = Eastern Oregon
Perennials

- **Bergenia cordifolia**
  - Heartleaf Bergenia

- **Carex species**
  - Sedges

- **Coreopsis species**
  - Coreopsis

- **Epilobium angustifolium**
  - Fireweed

- **Geranium species**
  - Cranesbill

- **Helianthemum nummularium**
  - Sun Rose

- **Hemorocallis hybrids**
  - Daylilies

- **Heuchera species**
  - Coral Bells

- **Hosta species**
  - Hosta Lilies

- **Iris species**
  - Iris

**s** = Southern Oregon  **w** = Western Oregon
Perennials

Kniphofia uvaria
Red-hot Poker

Linum perenne
Blue Flax

Lupinus species
Lupine

Oenothera missouriensis
Evening Primrose
Ozark Sundrops

Penstemon species
Penstemon

Stachys byzantina
Lamb’s Ear

C = Central Oregon    E = Eastern Oregon
Daphne x burkwoodii var. ‘Carol Mackie’
Carol Mackie Daphne

Gaultheria shallon
Salal

Ligustrum species
Privet

Mahonia aquifolium
Oregon Grapeholly

Pachystima myrsinites
Oregon Boxwood

Rhododendron macrophyllum
Pacific Rhododendron

Rhododendron occidentale
Western Azalea

Yucca species
Yucca

S = Southern Oregon  
W = Western Oregon
Shrubs - deciduous

- *Acer circinatum*  
  Vine Maple

- *Cornus stolonifera*  
  Redosier Dogwood

- *Acer glabrum*  
  Rocky Mountain Maple

- *Euonymus alatus*  
  Burning Bush

- *Amelanchier alnifolia*  
  Pacific Serviceberry

- *Holodiscus discolor*  
  Oceanspray

- *Buddleia davidii*  
  Butterfly Bush

- *Philadelphus species*  
  Mockorange

- *Caryopteris x clandonensis*  
  Blue Mist Spirea

- *Rhus species*  
  Sumac

C = Central Oregon  
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**Shrubs - deciduous**

- **Ribes species**
  - Flowering Currant

- **Spiraea douglasii**
  - Western Spirea

- **Rosa woodsii**
  - Wood's Rose

- **Spiraea x bumalda**
  - 'Goldflame'
  - Goldflame Spirea

- **Symphoricarpos albus**
  - Snowberry

- **Syringa species**
  - Lilac

**Trees - evergreen**

- **Larix occidentalis**
  - Western Larch

- **Pinus lambertiana**
  - Sugar Pine

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S = Southern Oregon  
W = Western Oregon
1. Foliage is moderately resistant to fire.
Trees - deciduous

- **Juglans species**
  - Walnut

- **Liquidambar styraciflua**
  - American Sweetgum

- **Populus species**
  - Aspen/Cottonwoods

- **Malus species**
  - Crabapple

- **Quercus palustris**
  - Pin Oak

- **Quercus rubra**
  - Red Oak

- **Robinia pseudoacacia**
  - Black Locust

- **Salix species**
  - Willow

- **Sorbus aucuparia**
  - European Mountain Ash
Plant descriptions and availability

For a detailed description of the plants on this list, consult local nurseries or refer to the Sunset Western Garden Book and the A-Z Encyclopedia of Garden Plants. These publications can be obtained at local bookstores or nurseries. If you are unable to find some of these plants locally, check out the Oregon Association of Nurserymen’s website for plant availability at:

http://www.nurseryguide.com

Scroll down to “Search For...” and click on Plants by Name. Type in the name of the plant you’re interested in and the search will give you a list of nurseries that carry the plant.

Help us identify other fire-resistant plants

If you know of other fire-resistant plants suitable for Oregon, let us know. We will research your plant and, if it fits the criteria, we will add it to the list.

Contact us at:
Stephen Fitzgerald
Phone: (541) 548-6088, x16
Email: Stephen.Fitzgerald@orst.edu

Amy Jo Waldo
Phone: (541) 548-6088, x12
Email: Amyjo.Waldo@orst.edu
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Additional Useful Websites:
www.firewise.org
www.firefree.org
www.odf.state.or.us
www.deschutesimpact.org