KPOV – *The Point*

Gardening: Get Good at It

“Fire-wise Landscaping”

July 6th, 2021

As the Western United States population continues to grow, more and more homes are creeping into forest and rangeland areas called the wildland urban interface. As homeowners continue to build in the wild and urban interface, they must take special precautions to protect their homes and property from wildfires.

Wildfire threatens homes in three ways:

* direct contact by flames,
* radiated heat, and
* firebrands (burning embers).

Homeowners can take action to reduce the ignition potential on and immediately adjacent to the home to combat incoming firebrands by creating a defensible space around the home. Defensible space is the area between a structure and an oncoming wildfire (or between a burning structure and wildland vegetation) where nearby vegetation has been modified to reduce a wildfire’s intensity and ability to spread. Having a defensible space not only protects homes, it also helps protect those who are defending homes by providing safe ingress and egress.

Three critical steps in creating a defensible space include

1. using fire-resistant building materials (for example, roofing materials),
2. reducing wildland fuels around the home, and
3. using fire-resistant plant material in the landscape

The Home Ignition Zone begins at the home and extends out as far as 100 to 200 feet depending on the characteristics of adjacent lands. Maintaining the Home Ignition Zone lean, clean and green reduces ignition risk and the fire spread potential. Within the Home Ignition Zone, a fire-resistant landscape can be created by reducing flammable fuels. These Landscape Zones within the Home Ignition Zone can be used when selecting fire-resistant vegetation in fire-prone environments

Landscape Zone 1: 0-5 feet if the structure has one-hour flame-resistant siding OR 0-10 feet if the structure has non-flame-resistant siding. In this zone, the goal is to prevent ignitions on or near a structure.

* Plant no trees or shrubs.
* Use only inorganic mulch. (Rubber mulch is not acceptable for use.)
* Plant fire-resistant plants with high moisture content.

Landscape Zone 2: 5-30 feet. In this zone, the goal is to prevent any spread of a fire that may be ignited from burning embers or other ignition sources.

* Plant single trees that are pruned at least 10’ from the ground.
* Plant single shrubs.
* Keep the area well groomed.
* Clean up dead fuels.
* Eliminate continuous ground fuel and ladder fuels.

Landscape Zone 3: 30-100+ feet. In this zone, the goal is to reduce the heat generated by a fire (intensity) as it gets closer to a structure.

* Maintain well-spaced trees with crowns well separated.
* Eliminate ladder fuels.
* Minimize ground/surface fuels.
* Keep shrubs pruned, thinned, and well-spaced

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

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.
* Sap or resin materials are low

A well-maintained lawn can be included in a fire-resistant landscape and serves as an effective fuel break. There is a wide array of trees and other plants from which to choose that are both attractive and fire-resistant – Links to fire resistant plant lists will be included on the COMGA website.

Fire-resistant does not mean fireproof! Even fire-resistant plants will burn if not well maintained. Remember: “Lean, clean, and green” are the essentials to a fire-resistant landscape and “if it is brown trim it down”.

While taking actions to create a defensible space do not ensure that your home will survive a wildfire, they substantially increase the chances.

To learn more about creating a Fire-wise landscape, consider attending the free Fire-wise Landscaping Webinar offered by OSU horticulture experts as part of the **Growing Oregon Gardeners: Level Up Series**

For answers to all your gardening questions, and to register for the webinar, please visit our website: gocomga.com and click on the KPOV tab on the orange bar. This has been Gardening: Get Good at It on KPOV’s The Point.

Resources:

To register for the live webinar (July 13 - 3pm) or view the recording: <https://extension.oregonstate.edu/mg/events/fire-wise-landscaping-growing-oregon-gardeners-level-series>

Fire-Resistant Plants for Home Landscapes - <https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/pnw590>

Fire-Resistant Landscapes: <https://extension.wsu.edu/chelan-douglas/gardening/firewise-landscapes/>

Fire Resistant Plants for Chelan/Douglas County, Washington: <https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2086/2018/01/fireresistantplants2017.pdf>

Fire Resistance of Plants Master Database & Placement of Species Within Firewise Landscape Zones For Southern Idaho - <http://idahofirewise.org/assets/library/Homeowner%20Information/Firewise%20Landscaping/Fire%20Resistance%20of%20Plants%20Master%20Database.pdf>