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Landscaping for fire prevention

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When it comes to preparing your rural property to prevent wild fires a few simple tips can make you landscape much safer.

The basic concept to remember is to do everything possible to slow and prevent the spread of fire from the surrounding woods to your home and buildings.

This starts with creating a defensible space surrounding your buildings. Keeping flammable vegetation back at least thirty feet from your structures will decrease the odds of fire spreading from the woods, or the ground cover to your home. This space also allows fire fighters access to the building in the event of a fire.

When choosing foundation plantings, low growing pines, spruces and junipers should be avoided as they can be very flammable under certain conditions. Deciduous shrubs would be a better choice. Spacing out the plantings in your landscape will also reduce the chance of fire climbing up under story plantings like a ladder into the crown of evergreen trees and jumping to your buildings. Removing low branches on evergreens below ten feet will also help to prevent laddering. Installing proper mulch beds at the base of these trees will not only help the health of the trees it will eliminate weeds, grasses and other flammable materials that may help to spread the fire to the crown of the trees. Carefully pruning dead branches over buildings and keeping the crowns of trees free from large amounts of dead wood also helps to keep fire at bay. Keeping your grass neatly mowed and out from under overhangs, balconies and porches will also prevent creeping grass fires from coming in contact with combustible building materials. You should consider skirting overhangs to prevent debris accumulation and the fire hazard this will represent.

Fire wood piles should be kept well away from buildings, as should propane tanks and gasoline storage areas. Flammable liquids should be stored away from your home and shop in a separate well ventilated out building.

Wood splitting and saw milling debris should be hauled off site or burned in a stove or other safe disposal method. Do not let them accumulate or just burn them in the open. They can start a creeping ground fire even when conditions like snow and rain make it seem safe. From experience I know fire will travel under snow in a dry duff layer and can spread to structures very quickly.

The same is true for any piles of branches and combustible debris keep it in an isolated area or better still remove it from the property. Keeping the forest floor free from downed woody debris close to your buildings and vehicles will not only look tidy it will reduce the potential that these could become hot spots in the event of a fire. Make sure parking areas are free from grass and other debris that could come in contact with the cars exhaust and start a fire. Old vehicles surrounded by tall grass are a disaster waiting to happen. Remember old tires are very flammable. You don't have to turn your landscape into a plowed field or giant fire break to reduce the risk of fire damage, just use common sense and be prepared. Keep up to date fire extinguishers in key places on your property. Take the time to walk your property and identify hazards, deal with them and your property will be safer.

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