

# HOW TO CREATE A FIRE SMART YARD

A Guide for Homeowners and Landscapers



A fire smart yard protects a home from wildfire. This guide shows homeowners and landscapers how to work together to make small, relatively inexpensive changes that make a big difference to lower the risk of wildfire on their properties.

## RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

- Clear the first five feet around the house
- Choose the right mulch
- Remove hazardous plants
- Create horizontal and vertical plant spacing
- Create fire smart privacy screens
- Maintain trees and shrubs

## ZONE 0

# Remove combustible materials within the first 5 feet around the home.

This is one of the easiest and most cost effective improvements you can make. Use hardscape materials and gravel to eliminate potential ignition sources. There are many options including concrete, brick pathways, natural stone pavers and attractive gravel.



### COST RANGE

**\$1–\$3 /sq FT**

- Crushed Stone
- Gravel

**\$10–\$20 /sq FT**

- Pebbles

**\$25–\$250 /sq FT**

- Natural Stone Slabs

**ANOTHER OPTION IS TO PLACE PLANTERS OR POTS ON GRAVEL.**



*Planters should be made of ceramic or metal and contain low growing plants.*

## MULCH

### Choose an appropriate mulch for your landscape.

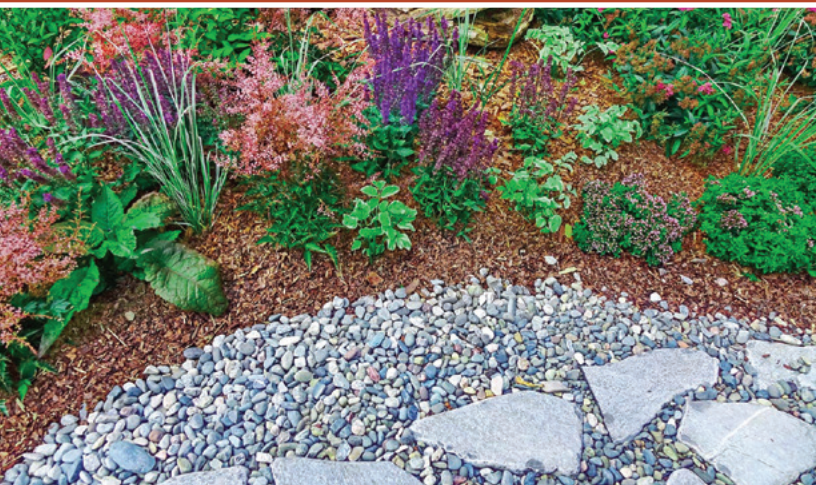
Mulch is organic material used as top dressings on your garden bed to conserve water and suppress weeds. Compost is more typically used as an amendment to enrich soil. Studies have shown that composted mulch is the most fire resistant.



**COMPOSTED MULCH: ~\$18 /YD**

### USE SMALLER MATERIAL/CHIPS IN THE AREA 5-30 FEET FROM THE HOME.

For areas between 5 to 30 feet of structures, composted wood chips may be used in small batches. Since these materials are combustible and will transmit fire across an area, do not use them in a widespread or continuous manner. Within this perimeter, alternate areas between bark and non-combustible materials such as concrete, gravel, rock, and well hydrated lawn.



## Remove and replace hazardous plants.

The most common hazardous plants found in Marin include Italian cypress, juniper, and bamboo. All of these plants are very flammable, difficult to maintain and should be removed.

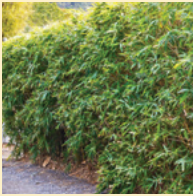
### REMOVE



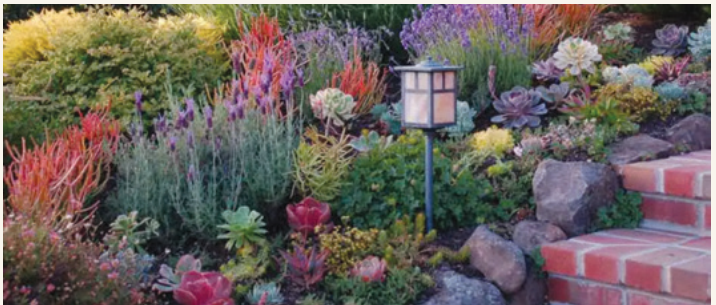
**Junipers'** woody interior, fine oily needles and tight structure makes it a highly flammable ember trap.



**Italian Cypress** is known as a "Roman Candle" for its combustibility.



**Bamboo** ignites easily when burning embers get trapped in the dead leaves at its base.

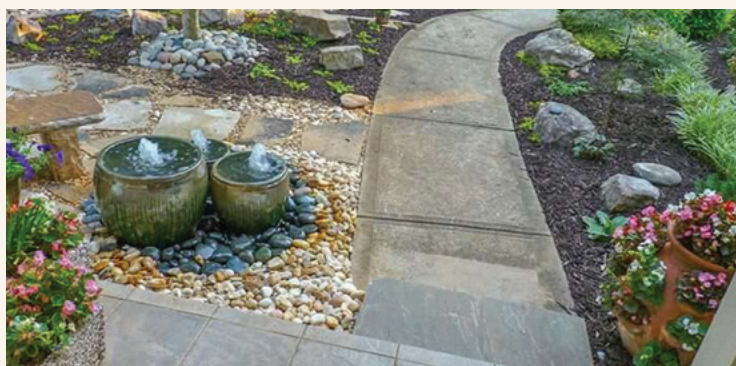


### PLANT SELECTION:

- **Choose** plants that hold moisture and have an open-growth structure, allowing embers to pass through without igniting.
- **Avoid** plants that accumulate dead branches, needles, leaves and shed bark.
- **Avoid** plants that contain a lot of waxes, oils, and resins.
- **Consider** how fast and how tall a plant will grow. Quick growing and tall plants may require greater maintenance for safety under trees or near structures.
- **Consider** natives, drought tolerant, and pollinator-friendly plants.

# Create space around the plants in your yard to slow the spread of fire to your home.

The key to fire smart landscaping is to create fuel breaks throughout the yard, interrupting the pathway of fire. Plant islands separated by hardscape, gravel and/or composted mulch create a fire resistant and attractive landscape.



### **COST TIP:**

These types of projects can be done over time to reduce costs. You can save money by moving and separating existing plants.

# Separate the lowest branches of trees from plants beneath.

Fire tends to spread to trees when plants and shrubs connect or are close to the lowest branches. This is called “ladder fuel.” A small ground fire can climb quickly and get out of control. A landscaper can easily remove ladder fuel by keeping plants low beneath trees and limbing up branches.



Limbs with foliage should be pruned where they overhang buildings. Exceptions are allowed if removal of the limb would jeopardize the health or stability of the tree. The goal is to minimize leaf litter on the roof and reduce the exposure of the building to flames if the tree were to ignite. You might need to consult with an arborist before pruning large, mature trees.



### **COST SAVER:**

Remove fuel at NO COST by signing up for Marin Wildfire’s Chipper Day at [Chipperday.com/marin](http://Chipperday.com/marin)



# Install and maintain privacy screens to lower the risk of ignition.

Densely planted privacy screens can create a wall of fuel, making a continuous pathway for fire. Alternating trees with your neighbor can create a very attractive screen—breaking up the line of fuel.



*Create space between trees and limb up low branches to reduce the risk of fire spreading*

Choose smaller, well maintained trees with broad, waxy leaves that don't build up dead material. The English Laurel screen in this example has "raised skirts" at the base, gravel mulch and an open growth structure that resists ember accumulation. It is deer resistant, evergreen, and fairly drought tolerant.



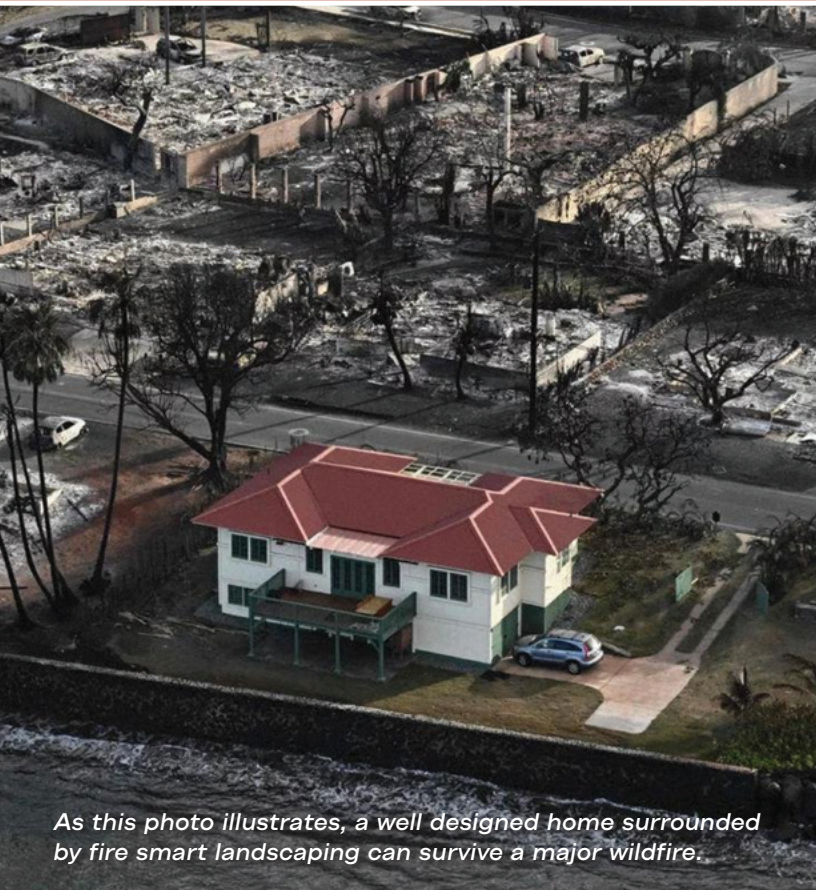
*English Laurel Screen*

Trees of desired maturity can be purchased at several large nurseries in the North Bay.

### **COST RANGE:**

The cost of shrubs and trees for privacy screens depends on the maturity of the plant.

## FIRE SMART LANDSCAPING WORKS



*As this photo illustrates, a well designed home surrounded by fire smart landscaping can survive a major wildfire.*

### **WORK WITH YOUR LANDSCAPER TO MAKE A PLAN FOR A FIRE SMART LANDSCAPE DESIGN.**

- 1.** Make a plan that gradually phases in the work over time and spreads out the cost.
- 2.** Replace combustible mulch with composted mulch and gravel.
- 3.** Start by removing combustible materials around the first five feet of the house.
- 4.** Remove hazardous plants like cypress, juniper and bamboo.
- 5.** Spread out plants by thinning, removing dead plant material, and moving plants to better locations.
- 6.** Limb up your trees and remove brush and plants under trees.
- 7.** Replace fire prone privacy screens with attractive alternatives.

#### **FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:**

Fire Safe Marin at [firesafemarin.com](https://firesafemarin.com) or UC Marin Master Gardeners at [marinmg.ucanr.edu](https://marinmg.ucanr.edu)

