

The Hidden Fire Risk of Pampas Grass

Pampas grass has become a popular choice for landscaping in many areas, including Marin County, because of its attractive feathery plumes. However, pampas grass poses significant fire risks that homeowners must consider. Understanding these risks and opting for safer alternatives can help protect our community from the ever-present threat of wildfires.



What is Pampas Grass?

Pampas grass (*Cortaderia selloana*) is a tall, perennial grass native to South America. It is known for its dense clumps of long, slender leaves and large, fluffy flower plumes that can reach up to 10 feet in height.

Fire Hazards of Pampas Grass

One of the primary concerns with pampas grass is its high flammability. The plant's long, dry leaves and flower stalks can easily ignite, especially during the dry summer months. Once ignited, pampas grass can burn intensely and spread flames rapidly, acting as a ladder fuel that allows fire to climb from the ground to taller vegetation. This can exacerbate the spread of wildfires, making them more difficult to control. In fire-prone areas like Marin, it is crucial to minimize the presence of such combustible vegetation.

Local fire agencies have documented instances where pampas grass has significantly contributed to the intensity and spread of wildfires, endangering homes and lives.

Environmental Impact

Beyond its fire risks, pampas grass is also considered an invasive species in California. It spreads rapidly, outcompeting native plants and disrupting local ecosystems. This aggressive growth can lead to the displacement of native flora, which in turn affects the wildlife that depends on these plants for habitat and food.

Safer Alternatives

Fortunately, there are numerous fire-resistant plants that can provide the same aesthetic appeal without the associated risks. Native grasses and other ornamental plants are alternatives to pampas grass. These species are better adapted to the local climate and are less likely to ignite during a wildfire.

Fire Smart Tip



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Consider planting native options like deer grass (*Muhlenbergia rigens*) or purple needlegrass (*Stipa pulchra*). These plants not only enhance the beauty of your garden but also support local wildlife and contribute to a healthier ecosystem. Additionally, they require less water and maintenance compared to non-native species, making them a sustainable choice for landscaping. Learn more about plant choices from the [UC Marin Master Gardeners](#).



Removing Existing Pampas Grass

For those looking to remove pampas grass altogether, be sure to dispose of it properly to prevent it from spreading.

Cutting and Removal: Use gardening shears or a saw to cut the pampas grass close to the ground. Wear protective clothing, as the leaves can be sharp and irritating to the skin.

Disposal: Marin Sanitary Service recommends putting Pampas grass in your green bin. If you have large quantities of pampas grass, take the bagged debris to a local landfill or transfer station that accepts green waste.

Prevent Regrowth: After removing the pampas grass, cover the area with a thick layer of composted mulch or use a weed barrier to prevent regrowth. Regularly monitor the area for new shoots and remove them promptly.

In Marin, where the threat of wildfires is a constant concern, making informed landscaping choices is crucial. By opting for fire-resistant, native plants, we can create beautiful, sustainable landscapes that help protect our homes and the environment. For more information on fire-safe landscaping [visit Fire Safe Marin](#). Together, we can make our community safer and more resilient in the face of wildfire threats.



Stay safe and garden wisely!

Learn more at firesafemarin.org



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