



FIREWISE LANDSCAPING

Maryland annually averages over 650 wildfires that burn over 3,500 acres. Homes built in or near the forest can be at risk of being ignited by a wildfire. However, homeowners can protect themselves and their property by knowing the facts about wildfire in Maryland, and by using Firewise landscaping techniques around their home.

Unlike the western United States, where the peak wildfire season is in the summer, the highest wildfire occurrences in the Mid-Atlantic States are in the spring and fall. However, wildfires can occur in any month in Maryland. During the spring and fall wildfire seasons, the relative humidity of the air is generally lower, causing the leaves and woody debris on the forest floor to be dry. The leaves are also off the trees, allowing sunlight and wind to reach the forest floor, further drying the fuels. Wildfires in Maryland typically burn as surface fires along the ground, and rarely burn as sustained crown fires in the tree canopy. The vast majority of these fires (98-99%) are caused by people, with debris burning, arson, and equipment use as the leading causes.



Forest homeowners can mitigate the risk from wildfires by using “Firewise” practices around their home. Firewise Landscaping is a concept that focuses on “breaking the chain” of fuel between a home and the surrounding wildland fuels. By choosing the right plants and placing them correctly in the landscape, homeowners can keep a wildfire from spreading to their home. One way to visualize Firewise Landscaping is through the “Zone Concept”, which views the landscape as a series of concentric rings around the house. Each ring forms a zone, in which the landscaping practices have a slightly different focus. When combined, these zones extend as little as 30 feet, and up to 100 feet, from the home. It is in this relatively small area around the house that homeowners should focus their efforts.

Zone 1 extends from the house out to a distance of 3-5 feet. In this zone, the goal is to prevent any flames from directly touching the house. This is done by placing any plants far enough from the house that if they catch fire, it cannot spread to the house. Fire resistant plants and mulches should be used in this zone. As such, evergreen plants and shrubs should be avoided in close proximity to the house.

Zone 2 extends from Zone 1 out to a distance of 10-12 feet from the house. The goal of Zone 2 is to stop an approaching wildfire. A green, mowed lawn is perhaps the best defense against a wildfire, and is the most important part of Zone 2. Landscape plants used in this zone should be placed far enough apart that fire cannot spread from one to another. Large deciduous trees can be used in this zone because they are not very flammable, however, evergreen trees should be avoided.

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