



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.



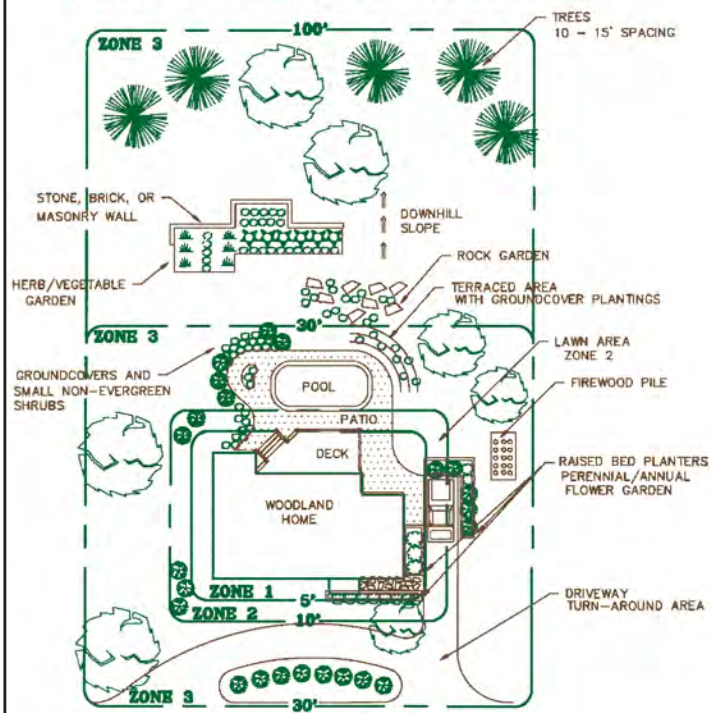
Forest homeowners can mitigate the risk from wildfires by using “Firewise” practices around their home. Firewise Landscaping is a concept that focuses on “breaking the chain” of fuel between a home and the surrounding wildland fuels. By choosing the right plants and placing them correctly in the landscape, 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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LANDSCAPING FOR FOREST FIRE PROTECTION



Zone 3 continues from Zone 2 out to a distance of approximately 30 feet from the house. If the house is located on a steep slope, Zone 3 should be extended out to 100 feet on the down-slope side of the house. There are two purposes for Zone 3; which are to stop the spread of an approaching wildfire, and to provide an area for firefighters to work to defend the house. Place landscape plants far enough apart that firefighters can easily maneuver between them. This will also separate the plants enough that fire cannot spread from one to another. Islands of landscape plants can be used here, but should be spaced far enough apart to meet the requirements above. Like in Zone 2, it is very important to maintain a green, mowed lawn out to a distance of at least 30 feet from the house in all directions. Also like in Zone 2, small evergreen shrubs are acceptable, but large evergreen shrubs and evergreen trees should be kept at least 30 feet from the house. Deciduous, green, succulent landscaping plants are preferred in all the zones.

Outbuildings and fences should also be included in any Firewise practices. Extend the Firewise Landscape zones to include outbuildings, or if they

are far enough from the house, establish a separate set of zones for each outbuilding. It is important to keep all structures Firewise, because outbuildings that catch fire can easily loft embers toward the house and set it on fire. Clear fuels at least 10 feet away from any flammable fences, or separate flammable fences from structures with a section of non-flammable fencing. This will prevent fences from acting like “wicks” and giving the fire a path of fuel directly to the house.

Firewise Maintenance is an extremely important part of Firewise Landscaping. As mentioned above, keeping a lawn that is green, healthy, mowed, and free of leaves or other flammable debris is the single greatest defense against a wildfire. At least twice each year, remove leaves and other flammable debris from the roof and gutters, under decks, against buildings, and in the yard throughout Zones 1-3. Within 150 feet of the house, remove any snags (standing dead trees) and large downed woody debris, including fallen trees and branches up to 4” in diameter. This will help decrease the intensity of an approaching wildfire. If the surrounding forest has predominantly evergreen trees, remove any vines, low-hanging branches, or tall understory shrubs within 150 feet of the house. These fuels can act as “ladder fuels”, allowing a surface fire to spread into the evergreen canopy.

While wildfire can be a very real threat in Maryland, a simple weekend of work around the house can greatly reduce the risk. For more information on being Firewise, call the Firewise Maryland Program at 301-791-4010, or visit <http://www.dnr.state.md.us/forests/wfm.asp>.



An Example of Firewise Landscaping