



Be ImagiNATIVE!

Gardening with Natives in the Monterey Bay: Firescaping

California residents are fortunate in having a growing amount of information available to help them reduce the risk of losing property to wildfire. Books, pamphlets, websites and workshops provide detailed guidelines and recommendations for all aspects of “firescaping.”

The vegetation surrounding a home is one of several key considerations in assessing fire risk. Appropriate landscape design, plant selection and maintenance can greatly reduce the risk of property loss.

However, plants alone can't do the job. It is essential to follow design, irrigation, and maintenance guidelines recommended by your local fire department, reference materials and landscape design/management professionals.

With each wildfire season, new lessons are learned about the behavior and reaction of fire and plants. Be sure to check for, and take advantage of, the most current information before starting your firescaping project.

Benefits of Using Native Plants for Landscaping

The attached list outlines a selection of California native plants currently identified as being useful in firescaping to help create a defensible space around your home. Here are a few reasons for incorporating natives in your firescape or, indeed, in any landscape.

- Natives that are adapted to the local climate and growing conditions can require less special care.
- Natives grown from local sources can help protect local plant genetics and ecosystem integrity.
- Native plants benefit native animals by providing habitat needs such as food, nectar, and cover.
- Natives can be used instead of non-native invasive plants (such as ice plant, ivy, periwinkle and non-native grasses). Invasive plants can spread from gardens to wildlands causing disruption of habitats, ecosystems, and natural processes such as nutrient, fire, and water cycles.
- Many natives are great-looking plants!



Qualities of Plants for Firescaping

Fire Resistance: Plants are considered relatively fire resistant if they contain greater amounts of moisture in their twigs and foliage. Although all plants will burn under enough heat, these plants may be slower to burn under less intense conditions especially if they are properly maintained and irrigated. It's helpful to know and avoid plants that are strongly aromatic or contain volatile oils.

Low Fuel Volume: Plants contribute fuel to a fire based primarily on their height and density. Plants with a shorter, squatter stature keep fuel close to the ground. In contrast, an upright shrub or tree can contribute more fuel and a path for fire to burn and spread higher, faster, and hotter. Plants with an open branching pattern will not burn as fast as those with a tight pattern. However, even ground hugging plants can become a hazard if not maintained and dead or dry woody material is allowed to build up.

Importance of Design

The US Forest Service recommends creating landscape zones around your home or structures in the urban-wildland interface. The first zone is the "defensible space," a 30 foot perimeter that receives the highest amount of irrigation to stay green during the hottest months. This zone should emphasize firescaping plants and design and be kept relatively clear to allow easy access and maneuverability for fire fighters.

Beyond the defensible space, the selection and arrangement of plants still plays a critical role. For example, breaking up hedges or clumps of plant material can help slow the momentum of a fire.

Importance of Maintenance

Even the best plants and landscapes can become problems if they are not properly maintained. Firstly, make sure you use plants that are adapted to the site and recommended for firescaping. After that, make sure that your plants are kept healthy and appropriately spaced in order to reduce the fuel volume. This can be done by applying the necessary amounts of irrigation and by pruning the plants correctly.

Add Color with California Native Wildflowers

Add color and variety to your firescape by including California native wildflowers. Choose plants that are low growing and can be cut back regularly.

Lupines and California poppies can be seeded in to obtain the classic California blue and gold landscape. California fuchsia (*Epilobium* spp. Syn. *Zauschneria* spp.) and certain monkeyflowers (*Mimulus* spp.) are attractive flowering shrubby perennials. Both plants



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are relatively low growing (some less than 1' tall) and can be neatly pruned to maintain a low fuel volume. Yarrow (pink and white-flowering forms are available) and farewell-to-spring (*Clarkia* spp.) can also be added for color.

Suggested native plants for “firescaping” in the Monterey Bay

California native plants that perform well in the Monterey Bay and that are suitable for firescaping are listed below. When choosing plants for firescaping it's essential to remember that their fire performance can be seriously compromised if they are not maintained appropriately. This is true for both natives and non-natives.

Plants that are not properly irrigated or pruned or that are planted in climate zones not generally recommended for the plant, will have increased fire risk and will probably make the mature plant undesirable for landscaping in high fire hazard zones. (*U.C. Forest Products Laboratory: www.ucfpl.ucop.edu/I-Zone*)

The fire resistance ratings in the plant list below have been taken from *The Wildfire Survival Guide* by Maureen Gilmer.

Scientific Name	Common Name	Fire Resist (if ranked)	Height	Spread	Exposure	Flower Color	Comments
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Succulents:

<i>Sedum</i> species	Stonecrop	H	< 1'	varies	Sun-part shade	many	Several species and varieties
<i>Dudleya</i> species	Bluff Lettuce	H	< 1.5'	varies	Sun-part shade	yellow	Many species

Low-Growing Ground Cover Shrubs:

<i>Arctostaphylos hookeri</i> 'Monterey Carpet'	Monterey carpet manzanita	L	1'	5-8'	Sun-part shade	pink	Forms compact ground cover, shiny red berries
<i>Arctostaphylos uva-ursi</i> 'Wood's Compact'	Wood's compact manzanita	L	1'	6'	Sun-part shade	white-pink	Popular groundcover, shiny red berries
<i>Baccharis pilularis</i> 'Twin Peaks'	Dwaft coyote brush	L	1-2'	6'	Sun-part shade	white	Bright green leaves, moderate growth rate
<i>Ceanothus gloriosus</i>	Pt. Reyes ceanothus	L	1-1.5'	4-6'	Sun-part shade	light blue	Several selections available.
<i>Ceanothus griseus</i> var. <i>horizontalis</i>	Carmel creeper	L	1-3'	5-15'	Sun-part shade	light blue	Easy-care, handsome groundcover.



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<i>Mahonia repens</i>	Creeping barberry	M	1-3'	3'	Sun-part shade	yellow	Slow-growing. Bronze foliage in winter
<i>Salvia sonomensis</i>	Sonoma sage	M	1-2'	6'	Sun-part shade	lavender	Fast-growing with aromatic foliage.

Shrubs:

<i>Cercis occidentalis</i>	Western redbud	--	10-20'	8-10'	Sun-part shade	magenta	Winter-deciduous. Dramatic fall color.
<i>Heteromeles arbutifolia</i>	Toyon	--	6-10'	6-10'	Sun-part shade	white	Red berries in fall-winter.
<i>Mimulus aurantiacus</i>	Sticky monkey-flower	--	3'	3'	Sun	orange	Long-blooming season.
<i>Rhamnus californica</i>	Coffee-berry	--	3-15'	3-10'	Sun-part shade	greenish yellow	Large berries go from green to red then black when ripe.
<i>Rhus integrifolia</i>	Lemonade berry	--	4-5'	15'	Sun-part shade	pink	Large shrub with dark, glossy green leaves.

Perennials:

<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	Common yarrow	M	2-3'	may spread	Sun-Part shade	white-pink	Lacy, fernlike leaves.
<i>Armeria maritime</i>	Common thrift	L	5-8"	1'	Sun	white-pink	Grasslike leaves.
<i>Epilobium californica</i> (syn. <i>Zauschneria</i>)	California fuschia	--	1-3'	1-3'	Sun	dk. red	Attracts hummingbirds.
<i>Eriophyllum confertiflorum</i>	Golden yarrow	--	1-2'	1-2'	Sun	yellow	Gray, wooly foliage.
<i>Festuca rubra</i>	Creeping red fescue	--	8-15"	Creeping	Sun-part shade	---	Bright green grass. Mowable.
<i>Fragaria chiloensis</i>	Beach strawberry	M	6-12"	lush mats	Partial shade	white	red fruit attracts birds
<i>Grindelia stricta</i>	Gum plant	--	2-3'	2-3'	Sun	Bright yellow	Blooms at end of summer.
<i>Heuchera maxima</i>	Coral bells	M	1'	1-2'	Shade	Creamy white	Good cut flower.
<i>Iris douglasiana</i>	Douglas iris	M	1-2'	clump-ing	Sun-part shade	varies	Showy flowers
<i>Sisyrinchium bellum</i>	Blue-eyed grass	--	8-10"	clump-ing	Sun	blue-purple	Member of iris family
<i>Sisyrinchium californicum</i>	Yellow-eyed grass	--	1'	clump-ing	Sun-part shade	yellow	Blooms spring-summer

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Annual Wildflowers:

<i>Clarkia amoena</i>	Farewell-to-spring	--	4-5"	--	Sun-part shade	pink-lavender	
<i>Eschscholzia californica</i>	California poppy	--	8-24"	--	Sun	orange	
<i>Layia platyglossa</i>	Tidy tips	--	5-16"	--	Sun	yellow	
<i>Lupinus nanus</i>	Sky Lupine	--	8-24"	--	Sun	blue	
<i>Nemophila menziesii</i>	Baby blue eyes	--	6-12"	--	Sun-part shade	blue	
<i>Phacelia campanularia</i>	California desert bluebells	--	6-12"	--	Sun	blue	

Some Information Sources

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