



Creative and Sustainable Ways to Help Your Landscape Be Firewise

By Robin Stanley

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The last few years have been sobering ones for foothill residents. Between the King Fire in 2014 and the Butte Fire in 2015, it has become increasingly important that people understand what options they have to create a landscape that is attractive, water-saving and firewise.

For 15 years, UCCE Master Gardener Robin Stanley and her husband Mark, a retired CAL Fire administrator, have offered classes and presentations on fire-wise landscaping. This year's class will be Saturday, January 23. People sometimes wonder why we teach the class in winter, when fire isn't necessarily on people's radar. It's primarily because this is the time of year that it is safest and easiest to create defensible space. Again this year, we will be joined by Alice Cantelow, a Master Gardener who is also heavily involved in the Native Plant Society. Alice's portion of the class expands greatly the information we provide about good plants for your firewise landscape by featuring drought tolerant and native plants for your consideration.

In our classes, we try to focus on key points to keep in mind when looking at your property. These include the three R's – "Remove, Reduce and Replace."

- **REMOVE** through elimination of dead or dying material or other hazardous fuel sources.
- **REDUCE** and space out remaining plantings to eliminate the continuous line of vegetation that can serve as ladder fuels. Ladder fuels can be dry grass, shrubs or small trees which grow so close together that they allow fire to move up into the tops of trees, causing it to spread more quickly.
- **REPLACE** by replanting selected areas or even renovating the majority of your property. In either case, there are more plant options now more than ever.

There are probably lots of misconceptions about what a firewise landscape is, and isn't. In many cases, the work you do on reducing the fire risk of your property can actually result in a more

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attractive and healthier landscape. Reducing the overall number of trees on your property can reduce competition for water, sunlight and nutrients throughout your landscape. People often describe their new landscape as more “parklike.”

As you drive around our county, it’s hard not to notice the increasing number of dead and dying trees. Many people will have no alternative than to have trees taken down this year. If you have to hire a tree service to do work on your property anyway, it is sensible to make an informed decision about other tree removal that might be combined with that work. Several years ago, I wrote an article on how to choose an arborist. It can be found under “Archived Articles” on the Master Gardener website, listed at the end of this article. Other past articles on firewise landscaping topic, as well as a whole section of Fire Safety Resources (click on the Internet Resources button on the left side of the home page) can also be found on our website.

We hope you’ll join us on January 23, 2016 from 9:00 a.m. to noon in the Government Center Hearing Room, Building C, 2850 Fairlane Court in Placerville. Our goal for the free class is that participants will leave with a specific plan for their property that incorporates defensible space, water conservation, aesthetics, and sustainability.

If you can’t make the class, but want more information on this topic, send an email to the Master Gardeners and I will be happy to email you the class handout, which contains a whole page of resources, as well as an overview of the class.

UCCE Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://ucanr.edu/edmg>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.