

New Neighborhood Voice

www.NNVESJ.org

Isn't It Too Late to Worry About Fire Season This Year?

Don't know what to do? Or where to start?

It's never too late to prepare - for this year or next

Last month NNV broached that unpopular topic of "Fire Season" because it's upon us again. We mentioned that there are "do-able" ideas and techniques which ordinary people can do to prepare themselves and their properties to be as fire safe as possible.

Understandably, people often feel overwhelmed by what seem to be draconian and expensive fixes. NNV hopes to share some fairly simple, sometimes downright cheap, alternatives to tearing off your old shake roof or cutting your big beloved trees to the ground.

"Establishing Defensible Space" means planning and maintaining your landscape to

reduce the amount of flammable vegetation near your home. Unless we move away, we can't change the fact that we live in a "wildland interface area" here near the foothills and/or Alum Rock Park, but we can make it much harder for a fire to consume our homes. According to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) "as many as 80% of the homes lost to wildfires in the past could have been saved if the owners had followed a few simple fire-safe practices"!

"Defensible Space and a fire safe landscape don't mean a ring of bare dirt around your home," says the CDF "Fire Safe Landscaping" pamphlet. What they do mean is that the area

30 feet out from your home needs to be kept clear of highly flammable materials such as dry grass, leaves and brush. Thirty feet is actually a minimum - if you live on a hill, you should shoot for 150 feet.

If you're planting new trees, plant them on the fringe of your defensible space and space

them at least ten feet apart. If you have old trees, be sure they don't have dead limbs and keep them pruned so that branches are at least ten feet from your roof. Eliminate "fire ladders" by limbing up large trees so their lowest branches are more than six feet off the ground. If you have eucalyptus or other highly flammable trees on your property consider removing them or having them pruned and thinned. Look for an NNV photo of a beautifully shaped and pruned old euk.

If you're planting new bedding plants or shrubbery, choose drought-tolerant, fire-resistant varieties which have high moisture content and do not accumulate flammable debris. If you're stuck with old landscaping which doesn't have these attributes, you can do the next best thing by keeping your plants pruned, thinned, well-irrigated and tidy. The CDF suggests that *Myoporum parvifolium* "Putah Creek" is a good choice for a no-traffic, evergreen, *deer-resistant (!)* fire-resistant ground cover and NNV is closely monitoring a large planting of it on the slopes behind the new Lunardi's Market at Evergreen Village. If it continues to look as good as it has all spring and summer, we may replace the NNV ivy (ick!) with this vigorous, foot-tall, vine-y shrub. See the accompanying photo of *Myoporum-at-Lunardi's*.

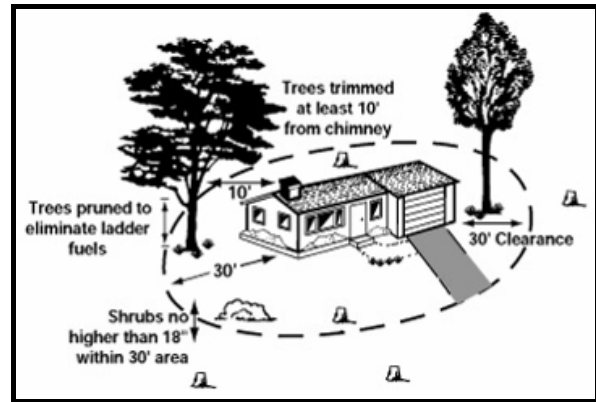
Now, back to that old dry roof. If it just happens that you're ready to replace it, be sure to choose fire-retardant materials like composition (which can be much cheaper than alternatives), tile or metal. If you're going to have to keep the old roof a while longer, have it treated with fire retardants regularly. According to SJFD Battalion Chief Joe Carrillo, those retardants should be reapplied at least every five years. In wind-driven fires, flammable roofs provide easy fuel for flying embers to kindle.

So what if you don't know which plants and trees are fire resistant and you don't know where to turn for information. CDF has good, free information pamphlets available and would be more than happy to make sure you and your neighbors are supplied with them. And, what if you can't get out and personally work in your yard because that sort of work is a thing of the past for you? If you have a gardener, ask him to include regular debris-cleanup and maintenance pruning as part of his work. If you don't have a gardener, lure your grown kids home with their favorite old recipe (tamale pie, was it?) and hand them the pruners and the rake. If all else fails, lean on your neighbors a little - after all, fire safety is a mutual concern in a neighborhood; *we're all in this together.*

Note: Want to read more before you start work? Representatives from the FireSafe Council, the CDF and the San Jose Fire Department plan to be at the YSI Wildlife Festival in Alum Rock Park on October 12

- come and visit their tables for more information (we've heard that the SJFD is also planning to have their Shark Fire Engine at the Wildlife Festival).

In the interest of full disclosure, we should point out that your editor is involved with the Santa Clara County FireSafe Council. Next month, we'll tell you more about the FireSafe Council and some of the things that have happened in Santa Clara County since the Croy Fire last year.



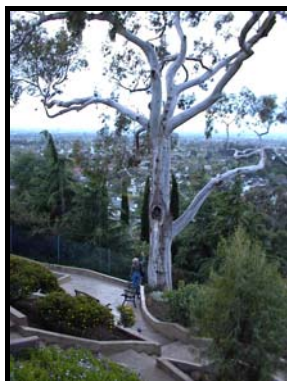
Defensible Space - Give firefighters a fighting chance!
(From the Calif. Fire Safe Council "Fire Safe Landscaping" - www.firesafecouncil.org)

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Yes, you can even prune a big Eucalyptus Tree so it's "Fire Safe"

Fire Resistant
Myoporum Parvifolium
(Putah Creek)
Behind Lunardi's at
Evergreen Village

