

Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian for May Firescaping



Mock orange is fragrant in bloom but a recommended fire-resistant species.

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It is critical to keep plants around our homes well maintained and pruned as a fire protection tool. The closer plants are to the house, the more care is needed.

Firescaping is simply a landscape design that reduces house and property vulnerability to wildfire. While enhancing the beauty of the property, we surround the house with plants that are less likely to ignite and create a defensible space.

Characteristics of Highly Flammable Flora

- Dry and dead leaves, twigs, branches
- Abundant, dense foliage
- Needles
- Low moisture foliage
- Peeling, loose bark
- Gummy sap
- Leathery or aromatic leaves
- High resin, terpene, or oil content
- High, uncut or dry grasses

Characteristics of Fire-Resistant Flora

- Hardy, slow growing plants that don't produce litter or thatch
- Native plants that are drought tolerant with internal high water content.

Generally, California natives are more tolerant of deer and fire.

(see Nature's Natives: April 17, 2019, <https://www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue1304/Digging-Deep-with-Cynthia-Brian-for-April-Natures-Natives.html>)

- Trees with thick bark that restrict the growth of invasive shrub species and hardwood trees such as walnut, cherry, maple, and poplar are less flammable. Deciduous trees and shrubs are generally more fire resistant because they have a higher moisture content when in leaf, lower fuel vol-



Lilacs are beautiful and less flammable than other plants. Photos Cynthia Brian

ume when dormant, and usually do not contain flammable oils.

- Supple, moist leaves with little to no sap or resin residue.
- Low growing ground covers.
- Bulbs.

How to Create a Fire-Resistant Landscape:

- Include fire-resistant features such as pavers, bricks, pavement, gravel, rocks, mulch, dry creek beds, fountains, ponds, pools, and lawns. Water features including ponds, streams, and pools can be helpful fuel breaks.
- Select high moisture plants that grow close to the ground with a low sap and resin content. (See an included list of plants, shrubs and trees)
- Maintain all plants and lawns. Clover, groundcovers and grasses that are kept low and green through irrigation are excellent alternatives. Mow, prune, water and space appropriately.
- Leave space between plants.
- Minimize the inclusion of evergreen trees within 30 feet of structures. Clear debris and understory. Have clearance of all trees within 20 feet of chimneys.
- Remove invasive species or swaths of flammable plants including ivy, rosemary, broom and juniper.
- Moist mulch, rocks or gravel can be used for firescaping. (Bark and leaf mulch can ignite unless sufficiently wet. Usage not recommended near structures.)
- When planting trees, identify the tree size at maturity.
- Prune trees carefully to remove the possibility of fire laddering.
- Arrange plantings in clusters and islands, with those near structures being smaller.
- Consider the combustibility of decorative features such as gazebos, fences, sheds, porches, and junk areas. Keep appropriate clearance to reduce the threat of burning embers.
- Bare ground is not recommended due to soil erosion.

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