

Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian

Scary, scary night



The Merrill Fire burnt to the back fences of houses in Moraga,

Photo Cynthia Brian

By Cynthia Brian

*“Starry, starry night
Flaming flowers that brightly blaze
Swirling clouds in violet haze.” – Don McLean*

In 1889, post-impressionist Vincent Van Gogh painted one of his most memorable paintings, “The Starry Night,” as he looked out of his asylum east window. On Oct. 10, when I looked out our east window, the starry night was aglow with flames and they were not the brightly blaze of flaming flowers. Normally, I look forward to October because of the frivolity of Halloween – costumes, candy, scarecrows, black cats, ghosts, ghouls, jack o’lanterns, and trick or treating offer children a scary evening of amusement. It was a scary, scary night, but it was not Halloween.

The power was off and a fire erupted racing down the hill to a neighborhood fast asleep. Firefighters were swift and efficient evacuating the community and containing the inferno. Police officers assisted in maintaining peace and safety. Fortunately,

all structures were saved and no injuries were incurred, thanks to the professional first responders. Gardens and landscapes survived the blaze with only a few fences being torched.

What homeowners need to know to be more fire-safe:

Lamorinda is rural, wooded, with minimal escape routes. Many of the plants and trees growing throughout our area are highly flammable including pines, cypress, cedar, fir, bamboo, acacia, juniper, Pampas grass, rosemary, ivy, arborvitae, miscanthus, and eucalyptus. Coyote brush, although moderately fire-resistant when it is young and green, is highly combustible as it grows. It depends on fires to regenerate and grows everywhere in our hills. All of these plants need to be removed or carefully supervised. Since heat moves up, fire speed and severity is stronger on slopes where vegetation management is crucial.

Autumn is a prime time to prepare your landscaping for the next season and create a defensible space around your property. A defensible space is an area around a structure that has been cleared of ignitable

debris and botanicals that may cause a public safety hazard. No plant is fireproof. Under the right conditions, every plant will burn, especially those that are drought-stressed or not maintained. A “fire-safe” plant means that it tends not to be a significant fuel source in itself with a chemical composition that resists heat and combustion. It is critical to keep plants around our homes well tended and pruned as a fire protection tool. The closer plants are to the house, the more care is needed. Every homeowner is responsible for managing their vegetation to meet fire district requirements.

Neighborhoods are encouraged to form a committee to receive advice from local fire professionals on how to be Firewise. Being Firewise is dependent on the diligence of everyone in a neighborhood to keep property fire safe. Fires do not honor property lines. All properties become indefensible when one neighbor has overgrown bushes, brush, or low hanging trees.

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