

Published June 9th, 2021

Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian

By Cynthia Brian



After weeding, this hillside is blooming with statice, gaura, geranium, calendula, and ice plant. Photo Cynthia Brian

Normally the sound of weed-whackers disrupts the tranquility of living the soulful country life, but this year, I am grateful to hear their constant buzzing. With a summer of historical dryness in front of us bringing a looming fire danger, cutting the grasses on hillsides, paths, and in backyards is imperative. I've been working on my property since early February weeding, cutting, pruning, mulching, repairing, and planting in preparation for a hot, dangerous year. You are encouraged to walk through your landscape and make sure you are also ready for whatever may transpire. We want to keep our community picturesque as well as safe. We all play a part in protecting our precious land and lives.

My articles on creating an Emergency Go-Bag and Wildfire Protection through Landscaping elicited numerous emails and comments (see story links on Page D14). The No. 1 request was to supply a list of plants that would be fire-retardant and fire-resistant.

When planning a new garden or adding plants to an existing landscape, it is essential to be reminded that no plant is fire-proof. Everything can and will burn if the temperature is hot enough. Also, even if a plant tag indicates that it is fire-resistant, it must be properly maintained, pruned, irrigated, spaced, and positioned in the correct locations to thrive. Plants that have been infested with pests, are too old, or are stressed will be more flammable. Plants that are not nurtured could create a problem for other vegetation. Inspect your botanicals carefully.

GARDEN ZONES

ZONE 1: DEFENSIBLE ZONE

Plants within 30 feet of a structure need to be considered for fire-retardance. This is Zone 1, the defensible space of your garden which will be able to withstand extreme heat and flying embers. Plants need to be watered thoroughly, trees are preferably deciduous, and the leaves of plants will be moist, fleshy, and broad.

Groundcovers for this area include:

- Lawn grasses
- Ajuga
- Isotoma
- Gazania
- Alyssum
- Moss
- Nasturtium
- Vinca
- Dwarf Plumbago
- Chamomile

Zone 1 Perennials include:

- Acanthus
- Agapanthus
- Artemisia
- Bergenia
- Canna
- Dusty Miller
- Shasta Daisy
- Chrysanthemum
- Coreopsis
- Foxglove
- Ferns
- Geranium
- Daylilies
- Impatiens
- Hosta
- Heuchera
- Penstemon
- Pelargonium
- New Zealand Flax
- Lamb's Ear
- Calla lilies
- Bird of Paradise

Zone 1 Shrubs include:

Rose
Privet
Boxwood
Camellia
Photinia
Mock Orange
Gardenia
Hibiscus
Pittosporum
Azalea
Rhododendron
Lilac
Viburnum
Oleander

Zone 1 Vines include:

Clematis
Trumpet Vine
Grape
Jasmine
Bower Vine
Wisteria

Zone 1 Trees include:

Fruit trees
Magnolia
Maple
Redbud
Birch
Pineapple Guava
Dogwood
Crape Myrtle
Liquid Amber
Ornamental Pear
Pepper Tree

ZONE 2: FUEL BREAK

From 31 feet to 70 feet from a structure, and even further up on slopes, is the greenbelt area which is designed to halt the fire. Plants in this area are the most fire-retardant with low fuels and high moisture content. These plantings can withstand neglect, freezes, droughts, and even insect infestations and still be fire-retardant. Ground covers don't grow over 18 inches. Trees and shrubs have space between them. In general, although succulents and cactus may not survive a fire, they are the best at retarding one.

Zone 2 Groundcovers include:

Succulents
Ice plant
Yarrow
Artemisia
Morning glory
Coreopsis
Santa Barbara Daisy
Wild strawberry
Gazania
Primrose
Osteospermum
Clover
Verbena

Zone 2 Perennials include:

Yarrow
Dusty Miller
California Poppy
Iris
Gaura
Euphorbia
Chrysanthemum
Coreopsis
Statice
Candytuft
Lupine
Red-Hot Poker
Sage
Yucca

Zone 2 Shrubs include:

Succulents
Cactus
Oleander
Pomegranate

Rockrose
Zone 2 Vines include:
Virginia Creeper
Lady Banks Rose
Honeysuckle
Nightshade
Senecio Confusus
Zone 2 Trees include:
Carob
Strawberry Tree
Redbud
Honey Locust
Chinese Pistache
California Black Oak
Sumac
Yucca
Joshua Tree

GENERAL FIRE-RESISTANT PLANTS

Although no plant is 100% fire-proof, these plants are less likely to burn. Several are already listed for Zones 1 and 2.

Bulbs (tulips, daffodils, iris, hyacinth, freesia, etc. Cut stalks to the ground when leaves are dry)

California redbud
Sage
Penstemon
Heather
Fuchsia
Columbine
Thyme
Poppy
Wild strawberry
Common yarrow
French lavender
Lantana
Lilac
Coreopsis
Ajuga
California lilac
Society garlic
Jasmine
Periwinkle
Alliums
Dianthus
Yellow or Purple Ice Plant
Creeping Phlox
Lamium
Sedum
Succulents
Veronica
Armeria
Agapanthus
Trumpet Vine
Daylily
Heuchera
Hosta
Red-Hot Poker
Lupine
Delphinium
Echinacea
Lamb's ear
Yucca
Rose
Salvia
Evening primrose
Daphne
Boxwood
Rhododendron
Spirea
Dogwood
Mock orange
Azalea
Currant
Viburnum
Aloe
Primrose

Candytuft
African Daisy
Calendula
TREES:
Horse Chestnut
Liquid Amber
Honey Locust
Crabapple
Purple Robe Locust
Fruit Trees (varieties of cherry, plum, pear, peach, apricot, pomegranate, fig)
Black Oak
Hawthorne
Birch
Aspen
Poplar
Maple
Manzanita (prune without deadwood)
Walnut
California Bay Laurel
California Pepper

Remember that deciduous plants are less flammable than evergreen. Gray and silver plants have a high mineral and ash content which makes them more fire-resistant. Vegetation with needles or fine, thin leaves is flammable. The more stored moisture a plant has, the more it can withstand a fire. Use less-flammable types of mulch, such as gravel or decorative rock, or a combination of wood bark mulch and decorative rock to dress your garden, retain moisture, and deter weed growth.

To burn, fires need fuel. By removing debris, planting and maintaining a fire-retardant and fire-resistant landscape, cutting down dead trees, thinning dried branches, spacing, pruning, watering, and keeping trees away from roofs, you will diminish the chance of ignition, lower fire intensity, and reduce the spread of a blaze. Your home will have a better chance of surviving a wildfire.

Best of all, you can still create a gorgeous oasis where you can entertain, relax, and socialize.

Firewise volunteers are available to offer advice in neighborhoods. The Orinda Firewise Council supports and educates the public about wildfire resilience. They are seeking landscapers and nurseries to assist with communicating ways in which homeowners can become more wildfire safe by making their property more fire-resistant. To work together with them to empower and beautify the community, go to <https://www.orindafirewisecouncil.org/contact-us>

Website: <https://www.orindafirewisecouncil.org>

You don't want fires to crawl fueled by unkempt low-lying vegetation, high grasses, or mounds of leaves. Get out the weed whackers and go to work. Be fire safe and enjoy a wonderful summer.

Happy Gardening. Happy Growing. Congratulations to the graduates and Happy Father's Day to all the great dads.

Links to Lamorinda Weekly "Go Bag" and "Firewise Landscaping" stories:

www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue1507/Packing-an-emergency-Go-Bag.html

[www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue1507/Digging-Deep-with-Goddess-Gardener-Cynthia-Brian-](http://www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue1507/Digging-Deep-with-Goddess-Gardener-Cynthia-Brian-Wildfire-protection-through-landscaping.html)

[Wildfire-protection-through-landscaping.html](http://www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue1507/Digging-Deep-with-Goddess-Gardener-Cynthia-Brian-Wildfire-protection-through-landscaping.html)



Asiatic lilies and Santa Barbara Daisies are both fire-retardant and fire-resistant. Photo Cynthia Brian



Roses are excellent fire-safe plants. (Mr. Lincoln rose) Photo Cynthia Brian



Black mustard plant becomes invasive, dries in summer as kindling for fires, and sprouts after fires. Pull it!
Photo Cynthia Brian



Grapes and roses along with love-in-the-mist nigella are fire-safe. Photo Cynthia Brian



Grapes and roses along with love-in-the-mist nigella are fire-safe.
Photo Cynthia Brian



This hillside is prone to wildfire.



Prune all trees to prevent fire-laddering.



A beautiful arbor of wisteria, roses, and scarlet trumpet vine, all fire-resistant botanicals.



Watered lawn grasses provide a defensive zone.



*Cynthia Brian working to make the garden fire-safe.
Cynthia Brian, The Goddess Gardener, is available for hire to help you prepare for your garden. Raised in the vineyards of Napa County, Cynthia is a New York Times best-selling author, actor, radio personality, speaker, media and writing coach as well as the Founder and Executive Director of Be the Star You Are!r 501 c3. Tune into Cynthia's StarStyler Radio Broadcast at www.StarStyleRadio.com.*

Buy copies of her books, including, [Chicken Soup for the Gardener's Soul](#), [Growing with the Goddess Gardener](#), and [Be the Star You Are!](#) www.cynthiabrian.com/online-store. Receive a FREE inspirational music DVD and special savings. Hire Cynthia for writing projects, garden consults, and inspirational lectures. Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com www.GoddessGardener.com

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[back](#)

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