



WHAT TO PLANT FOR FIRE & FLOOD A LANDSCAPE GUIDE FOR HILLSIDE RESIDENTS IN THE CITY OF SAN BUENAVENTURA

Vegetation Management

Vegetation management is a vital defense against wildfire and soil erosion for residences on hillsides in Southern California. Safety should be a primary component of any hillside landscape plan or maintenance practice.

Selecting plants that are fire safe and control erosion can be challenging. Evaluate your specific conditions and choose plants that grow easily and abundantly, have a low fuel volume, require infrequent watering, retain moisture and have a strong, deep root system.

Ground Covers and Shrubs

Ground covers and low growing shrubs are good choices that meet these requirements. Listed below are a few recommendations:

Prostrate Myoporum • Myoporum Parviflorum Capeweed
Arctotheca Calendula • Cultivar "Twin Peaks"
Baccharis Pilularis • Descanso Rock Rose • Cistus Crispus
Periwinkle • Vinca sp. • Trailing African Daisy
Osteospermum Fruticosum

Note: Some ground covers in the ice plant family (Carpobrotus) are not recommended for planting on certain slopes because they may add weight that can contribute to slides. Also, some ice plants tend to build a dense fibrous thatch after a few years growth, which can smolder during a fire.



Rock Rose

Grasses and Trees

Annual, drought tolerant grasses are also often recommended because they can tolerate various soil conditions, have many

fibrous roots, and emerge quickly. Some good choices of grass for our area are:

Zorro Annual Fescue • Vulpia Myuros
Blando Brome • Bromus Mollis
Cucamonga Brome • Bromus Carinatus

The grasses listed above are often chosen for revegetation of slopes that are partially or completely denuded of vegetation (and may have been subjected to fire), are close to structures and have a water supply.

If you are stabilizing property for fire and flood, a compromise of taller, deeper rooted plants and trees could be interplanted with ground covers according to the time of year and urgency of your situation. The following trees are recommended:

Coast Live Oak • Quercus Agrifolia
Redbud • Cercis sp.
Catalina Cherry • Prunus Lyonii

Plant Locations by Zone

The Zone system is a practical way of planning your landscape. Zone concepts are presented as guidelines only and should be modified to suit your specific conditions.

Zone 1

The area within 0-5 feet from a house should contain the least flammable type of landscaping: low growing, low maintenance ground covers with a high moisture content.

Avoid planting highly flammable evergreen trees and shrubs as they can quickly spread fire to your house.

Annual bulbs can also be planted in Zone 1 as they will bloom and the dry vegetation can be removed before fire season.

Zone 2

Ideally, the area within 5-30 feet from the house will consist of lawn, ground covers, low growing shrubs and mulches. Native shrubs should be spaced at least 18 feet apart. Plants should be adequately watered during fire season.

Zone 3

This area is between 30-100 feet from the house. On steep slopes, the zone may need to be extended in order to provide adequate defensible space. Grasses and small shrubs may be left as high as 18 inches from the ground on steep slopes and plants with a strong root system are recommended for soil stability. Fire resistive trees and shrubs are acceptable in this area as long as they are well maintained. "Ladder" fuels such as dead grasses, dead branches, dead trees and other combustible vegetation should be removed.

Landscape Maintenance

Ventura is a well established community with an abundance of trees and plants, many of which are not ideally suited to our climate. Unfortunately unhealthy, stressed plants and trees often contain excessive amounts of flammable plant material that can increase our fire hazard risk.

It is important to carefully prune, remove and dispose of all dead vegetation in a manner that will promote the health of trees or other plants while discouraging excessive growth. Trimming is adequate in most cases as plant removal can cause erosion. Certified arborists and horticulturists can provide valuable information regarding your trees and landscape.

Selected mulches may be used to reduce surface erosion and water consumption. Organic mulches can provide a healthier soil environment for the root system and reduce weed growth.

Please remember that properly spaced plants with sufficient irrigation and a minimum of dead plant material are an important part of providing the "defensible space" that our fire suppression forces need to protect your home.

Further Information

This bulletin has been designed to offer common sense solutions for basic landscape questions. If you need a professional opinion regarding steep slope stabilization, you may wish to contact a Soils Engineer (listed under Geologists in the yellow pages). Check your local nursery for specific plant information.

You may obtain additional information on the Fire Hazard Reduction Program by calling Ventura City Inspection Services at 654-7791.

Suggested Reading

- The Wildfire Survival Guide
Maureen Gilmer
- Trees and Shrubs for Dry California Landscapes:
Plants for Water Conservation
Bob Perry

Available at Ventura City Hall

501 Poli Street, City Information, Room 109 – \$1.50

- A Homeowner's Guide to Fire and Watershed Management
at the Chaparral/Urban Interface
U.S. Forest Service

HOURS:	Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Wednesday 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
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