The New Normal: Maintenance & Water Use for a Firewise Garden

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After you harden your home . . .

work on cleaning up your landscape
It’s possible to go a little too far!
Prepare

earthquake kit.jpeg

Flood sandbags.jpeg
5’-30’: Reduced Fuel Zone

Lean, Clean and Green

• Vegetation low in volume and density

• Trees and shrubs in well-spaced groupings/islands

• Ground fuel removed

• Irrigation maintains moisture in plant stems and leaves
Ongoing Maintenance Checklist

✔ Clear ground fuel (leaves, pine needles, plant litter)
✓ Remove dead or diseased branches or plants

✓ Remove all weeds
✓ Mow grasses in early spring to 4” or less
✓ Remove tree branches overhanging roof

✓ Keep at least 10’ away from chimney
✓ Clean all dead needles and leaves from roof and gutters
Remove vines from trees, shrubs, fences
✓ Don’t allow woody plants to form dead areas in the center
Avoid shearing
Yikes!
Thin overgrown vegetation
✓ Avoid topping trees
✓ Eliminate fuel ‘ladders’ for the fire to climb

✓ Keep vertical and horizontal spacing

https://articles.extension.org/pages/23720/ladder-fuels
Keep plants with the same general water and light needs together = hydrozoning
30’-100’ Zone

**Decrease the energy and speed of a fire by . . .**

- Eliminating continuous, dense vegetation
- Creating horizontal and vertical space
- Keeping trees cleaned of dead wood and trimmed up 10’
- Unincorporated areas are governed by Public Resource Code (PRC) 4291 = 100’ of defensible space
- Cities all have their own codes; check out yours
Critical Fire Danger

- Strong winds – usually from N-NE
- Low relative humidity - in low teens and below
- Warm temperatures – lack of cooling coastal influence at night
- Fuel
So What Do We Do?

- We have completed our home hardening regime
- We have completed our garden maintenance regime
- Now we make sure our gardens are irrigated to maintain moisture in plant stems and leaves

But how much water is the right amount?
Don’t forget about our wildlife
Purple line = actual water needs  Blue line = typical irrigation
Orange = under watering             Light purple = over watering
https://srcity.org/820/WaterSmart-Center

S.R. city water department has irrigation needs figured out for you!
Irrigation Schedule Recommendations: September 13, 2018

The Watering Index for this week is 86%

Controller Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Irrigation Type</th>
<th>Minutes per Week</th>
<th># Watering Days</th>
<th># Start Times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grass (Pop-Up Spray)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>1 - 2  A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grass (Rotor / Impact)</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>1 - 2  A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Water Plants (Drip)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1  B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Water Plants (Drip)</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1  B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Water Trees</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-  C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Water Trees</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-  C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WaterSense labeled irrigation controllers . . .

• Require proper installation, programming and maintenance
• Act like a thermostat for your irrigation system, telling it when to turn on and off
• Tailor watering schedules to actual conditions on your site
• Allow watering schedules to better match plants’ water needs
• Keep your landscape properly watered to retain moisture in stems and leaves = firewise
Check Irrigation System in March

- Change controller battery yearly
- Replace controller?
- Add rain/weather sensor?
- Install drip irrigation (+ pressure reducer & filter)
Mulches Can Be Beneficial

✓ Reduce water use

✓ Retain moisture in soil

✓ Cool the soil

✓ Suppress weeds

✓ Prevent soil compaction and erosion

✓ Give a unified look to your garden

✓ Compost can be used as mulch
Non-combustible Zone 0’-5’

- Stepping stones
- Concrete walkway
- Decorative rocks
- Low, irrigated ground cover*
  along the border

* *Dymondia margaretae-
check it out!
Mulch Fire Test
University of Nevada Mulch Combustibility Test

5 Pertain to Sonoma County

• Shredded rubber
• Pine needles
• Shredded Western Red Cedar
• Variety of wood chips
• Composted wood chips
Results

• Shredded rubber
• Pine needles
• Shredded Western Red Cedar
• Variety of wood chips
• Composted wood chips
Say no to shredded rubber mulch!

Toxicity tests are being conducted.
Say no to shredded wood mulch – "gorilla hair"
✓ Keep woodchips 4” or more away from all plants

✓ Layer only to a depth of 2” to help eliminate fuel and smoldering
Use Compost as Mulch

WHY?

• All wood mulches are flammable to various degrees

• They have to be raked off to add compost
  Who is going to do that?

• Compost is also flammable – to a lesser degree

• Compost feeds your soil’s microorganisms that feed your plants
Let’s Review

• Maintain 0’-5’ non-combustible zone

• Keep 5’-30’ lean, clean and green

• Maintain 30’-100’ with thoughtful spacing

• Prune trees and shrubs to enhance natural growth and shape

• Maintain and use your irrigation system

• Compost and mulch according to zones