

# GARDEN AS IF LIFE DEPENDS ON IT!

Home landscapes provide many critical ecosystem services including:

- **Food, shelter, and other habitat resources** for many species of birds, pollinators, and other wildlife.



- **Nurturing soil** by protecting it from erosion and feeding soil organisms with leaf litter. Healthy soil allows vigorous root growth, nutrient cycling, and water absorption.



- **Water filtration and conservation** with detention basins to collect stormwater and allow it to sink into the soil.



Credit: April Owens

The goal of the Resilient Landscapes Coalition is to encourage fire-wise landscape design and management in the defensible space zone, while at the same time enhancing biodiversity and wildlife habitat, and conserving resources.

The Coalition formed for several reasons:

- **To ensure** that wildlife habitat and biodiversity are protected and enhanced while meeting County and State code requirements and fire-wise recommendations within the defensible space zone.
- **To promote** sustainable practices to save energy and water.
- **To provide** specific design and plant selection recommendations at different distances from the house, encouraging the use of native plants, and identifying native plant communities as the framework for plant selection.
- **To highlight** the importance of working as a community to be fire-wise, sustainable, and to protect and enhance wildlife habitat.
- **To engage** the fire-protection community along with the environmental communities to create an integrated and holistic message.

THE RESILIENT LANDSCAPES COALITION PARTNERSHIP



VISIT US!



[SonomaResilientLandscapes.com](http://SonomaResilientLandscapes.com)

With funding from the Sonoma County Vegetation Management Grant Program



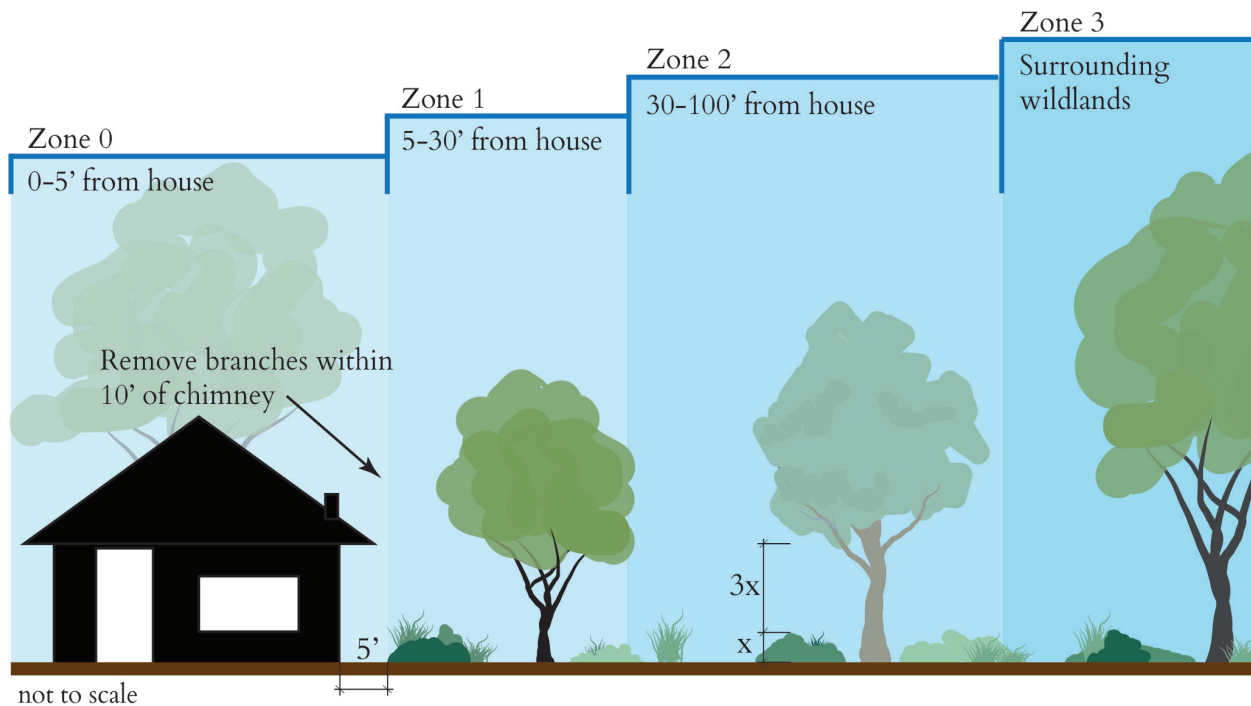
## RESILIENT LANDSCAPES COALITION



Credit: April Owens

## A GUIDE TO SUSTAINABLE DEFENSIBLE SPACE

[SonomaResilientLandscapes.com](http://SonomaResilientLandscapes.com)



not to scale

**Zone 0:** Flying embers are the primary cause of structure fires during a wildfire; start your work here!

- Within 5' of the house, optimally eliminate all vegetation. Any plants that do remain should be well maintained and adequately hydrated. Clean up all fallen leaves and needles regularly.
- Use only non-combustible inorganic mulches such as gravel. This is also a good area for brick or concrete walkways. Replace natural fiber doormats with heavy rubber mats or metal grates.
- Remove combustible materials: trash containers, lumber and firewood, patio furniture and clutter.
- Overhead trees are fine, but assure that they're healthy and free of dead wood. Maintain a distance of 5' from the roof and 10' from the chimney. Maintaining the roof and gutters free of debris is critical!

**Zone 1:** Clusters of plants divided by hardscape can slow the path of fire.

- Think "islands" or groupings of low, preferably native plants separated by non-combustible materials such as gravel paths, patios, and landscape features utilizing cobble and rock.
- The space between clusters of plants should be at least twice the height of the adjacent plants.
- Avoid "ladder fuels", lower vegetation that allows fire to climb to the canopy of trees and large shrubs. Create a vertical distance to the lowest tree branches of 3x the height of the understory plants, a minimum of 6' or 1/3 the height of smaller trees. Increase this vertical spacing on slopes.
- Use arbor mulch to 3" deep in planting areas to help maintain them adequately hydrated and healthy.

**Zone 2:** Transitioning to the broader landscape, continue to provide horizontal and vertical spacing.

- Larger plants and more extensive plant islands will increase habitat and benefit wildlife.
- Remove flammable invasive plants in all zones.

**Zone 3:** Practice stewardship of wildlands on your property.

- Adjacent wildlands provide critical habitat for many plants and animals that enrich our lives.
- Know your native species and exotic invasives. Don't modify vegetation without help from an expert.

For more information on Defensible Space ordinances and regulations see: [firesafesonoma.org](http://firesafesonoma.org)

## DEFENSIBLE SPACE GUIDELINES

- **Harden the home and minimize or eliminate plantings within 5' from the structure:** the highest priority for protecting your property!
- **Plant in "islands"** to provide habitat.
- **Remove "ladder" fuels** that allow fire to move into the canopies of trees.
- **Hardscape:** non-flammable landscape features made of brick, gravel, or stone.
- **Maintenance is critical and required by law!** On an ongoing basis, keep plants free of dead material, avoid unnecessary hedging, and maintain plants with adequate irrigation.
- **Work with your neighbors.** Recognize that your Zone 2 may be within their Zone 1.
- **Mow annual grasses and other weeds to 3-4"** in the summer. It's the law!
- **In Zones 1-2, allow leaf litter** to enrich the soil in winter and spring, but minimize it in Zone 1 in the summer.
- **Avoid "gorilla hair" mulch.** Arbor mulch is a good mulch material where appropriate.

## DEFENSIBLE SPACE MYTHS

- **Do we need to have a "moonscape"?** No! Diverse groupings of mostly native plants are beautiful and provide habitat. Native plants are adapted to our climate and easier to hydrate.
- **Do we have to cut down our trees?** No! Trees are important habitat elements, but we need to remove ladder fuels. Maintain a distance to the lowest branches of 3x the height of plants below, for a minimum of 6' or 1/3 the height of smaller trees. Rigorously remove debris from roofs and gutters.
- **What are the best fire resistant plants?** All plants burn. It's much more important to place plants in the right location and with their ultimate size and requirements in mind. Native plants conserve water and provide habitat.