

Virginia Firescapes

Your Best Defense

A home in a woodland setting is a home surrounded by forest fire fuel, and in real danger if a wildfire is on the loose.

The *Virginia Firescapes Project* was planted by volunteers to create a model landscape to graphically demonstrate how woodland residents can reduce the risk of forest fire through proper yard planting and maintenance.

FIRE-WISE LANDSCAPING can create a LINE OF DEFENSE against the threat of wildfire by creating a safety zone or defensible space around the home.

Safety zones help keep fire from spreading to or from woodland homes and provide a working space for fire fighters.

The goal is to BREAK THE CHAIN of flammable fuel between the home and the forest. This can be accomplished by selectively thinning existing vegetation, and planting and spacing fire resistant plants and trees 30 to 100 feet from the house.

Tree Selection

Woodland homeowners have two choices when selecting yard trees and plants. They can work with the plants and trees native to the site, using the patterns found in nature, or they can introduce new ones. Most homeowners do both. When choosing new species, homeowners should consider hardiness zones, planting site quality, fire resistance if within 30 feet of the house, and benefits to wildlife.

WHERE plants and trees are placed in a yard can be MORE important than the species when planning fire safety.

Fire Resistant Plants

There are no fire proof plants, but some are more fire resistant than others. Use these considerations when choosing plants and trees for your yard.

Choose plants and trees with:

- A high moisture content in the leaves. (Leaves that stay moist)
- A low oil or resin content. (Avoid pines and other evergreens)
- Minimal litter and accumulating debris.
- Limited foliage, and few dead branches.
- A lower overall height. (groundcovers)
- An open, loose branching habit.
- Easy maintenance and pruning.
- Drought resistance.

Fire-Prone Plants

Evergreen trees, such as:

Juniper, (*Juniperous sp.*) Pine, (*Pinus sp.*)
Cedar, (*Juniperous sp.*) Spruce, (*Picea sp.*)
Hemlock, (*Tsuga sp.*)

(If you live in a pine forest, maintain a safety zone of at least 75' on all sides of the house)

Evergreen shrubs
Tall ornamental grasses
Trees overhanging the house

Tree Health

ENVIRONMENTAL STRESS is the main cause of most tree health problems. Too much or too little water, light, nutrients or optimum temperatures can cause stress. A host of INSECTS AND DISEASES also threaten forest trees every year. Recently, we have seen an overwhelming number of trees die as the result of the gypsy moth and southern pine bark beetle. Trees are also susceptible to MECHANICAL DAMAGE during home construction, and their survival depends on careful planning.

"Proof"

Your Fire Place

You can help minimize the fire threat to your home by following these safety tips:

- Make sure firefighters can locate and reach your home. Mark house and roads clearly.
- Develop an emergency water supply. A swimming pool can act as both a fire break and a water supply for rural fire fighters.
- Store firewood and other burnables 30-100 feet from the house.
- Soak wood ashes in a metal container for 48 hours before dumping.
- Burn safely! Attend to outdoor fires until they are completely safe and dead out.
- Follow the outdoor burning laws. No burning March 1-May 15, before 4 pm. Keep fire tools readily available (garden hose, shovel, rake and ladder).
- Have and practice an escape route and plan.

For more information, contact:
Conicville Vol. Fire Department
P.O. Box 548,
Mt Jackson, Virginia 22842
or
Virginia Department of Forestry
P.O. Box 3758
Charlottesville, Virginia 22903

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VIRGINIA FIRESCAPES



**Firewise Landscaping
Demonstration Project**

**Conicville Volunteer
Fire Department
Mt. Jackson, Virginia**

SELF-GUIDED TOUR MAP

1

ZONE 1: 5' FROM THE HOUSE

This area, closest to the house, is the most critical for fire protection. Have nothing flammable next to the house. Maintain a well kept lawn, or use crushed brick or river stone gravel instead of mulch. Use raised beds, large decorative rocks, stone walkways, patios, perennials, ground covers, or other features to create visual interest while maintaining a fuel break for forest fire safety. Clean gutters, roof and deck of flammable debris. Store firewood and other burnables at least 30 feet from the house.

2

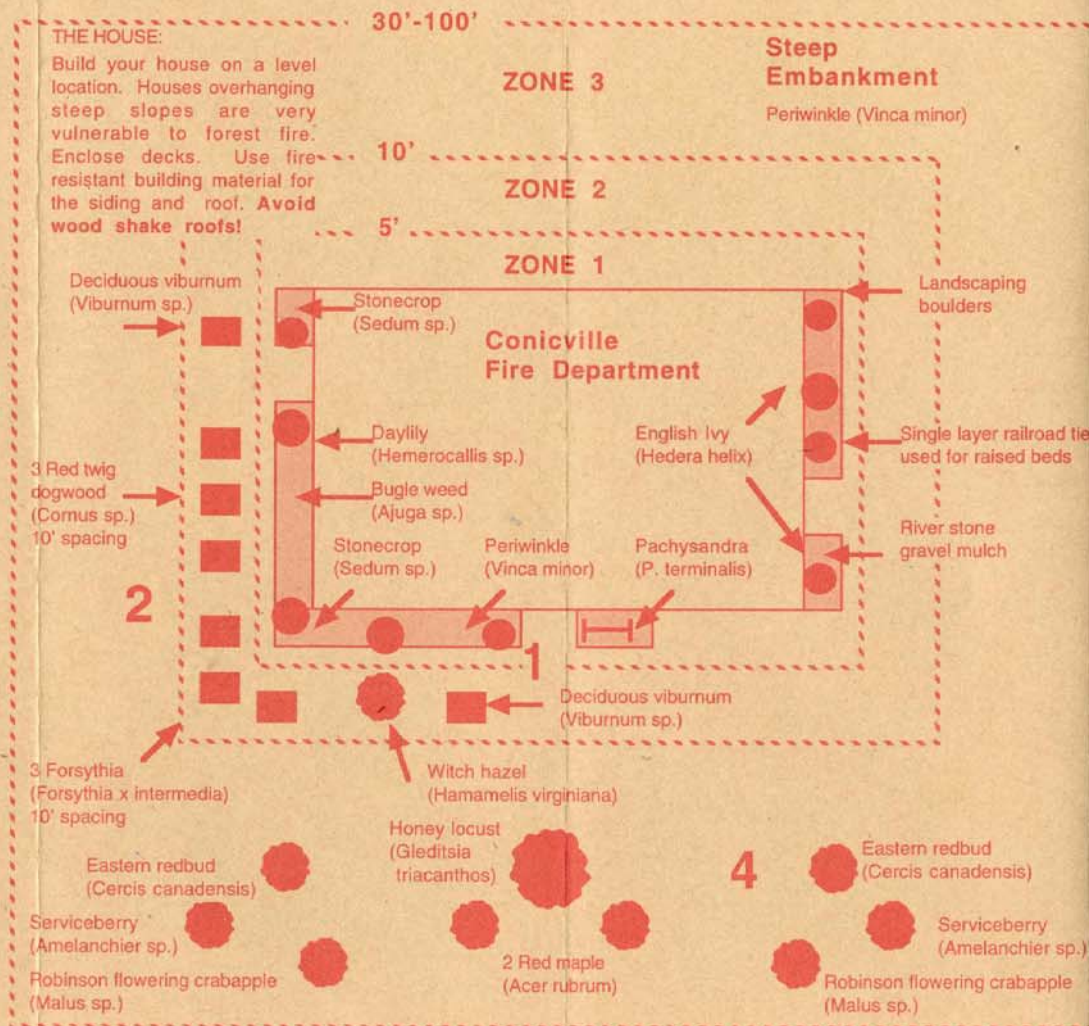
ZONE 2: 10' FROM THE HOUSE

Maintain a well-kept lawn and avoid evergreens that catch fire easily and burn quickly. Freshly tended flower beds, herb or vegetable gardens, rock gardens, stone walls and driveways can also act as fire breaks. Occasional trees should be at least 10 feet from the house.

3

ZONE 3: 30'-100' FROM THE HOUSE

Rake or use a leaf blower to remove leaves and twigs at least 30 feet from the house and up to 100 feet on the downhill side. Control brush and weeds annually. Steep areas can be terraced to slow down wildfires. A stone wall can also act as a fire barrier on very steep slopes. Avoid evergreens or space them widely.



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4

PRUNING AND SPACING

Prune and thin trees so that there are no dense stands or tree tops touching. Shrubs should be well maintained, kept free of dead material and kept small. Also, avoid "fire ladders" where fire can climb from the ground into tree branches. Do this by pruning trees, spacing tall trees away from medium-sized trees and by using ground covers or small plants under tall trees. Occasional trees and shrubs should be at least 10 feet from the house. Space trees with 10-15 feet between tree crowns and prune trees 10-15 feet up from the ground.